Magister-Auctor Saga

Mass Mediocrity

Moana Southpath
(met notas van Alberto Auctor)

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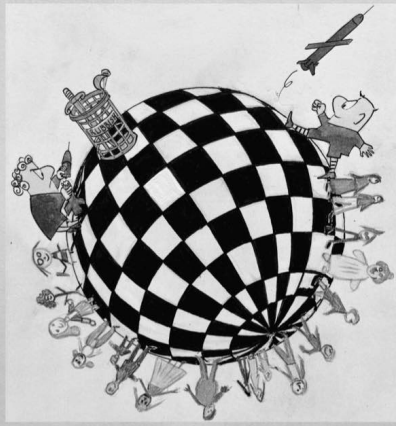

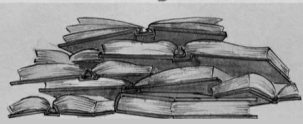

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To Manuel, Sebastião
and Olívia

Abbreviations

FIMEM - Féderation Internationale des Mouvements de l'Ecole Moderne
GFEN - Groupe Français de l'Éducation Nouvelle
ICEM - Institut Coopératif de l'École Moderne
IP - Institucional Pedagogy
LIEN - Ligue Internationale pour l'Education Nouvelle
MCEP - Movimiento Cooperativo de la Escuela Popular
MEM - Movimento da Escola Moderna
PI - Pédagogie Institutionnelle
RIDEF - Rencontre Internationale Des Éducateurs Freinet

Louis, Lucien, John and Jeanne

(1950 - 1969)

Summer 1950. Louis Demeester is sitting in his office. He has just discussed some adjustments with the administrator of the boarding school at the Normal School. The building will henceforth rent rooms to students who don' t have student housing in Ghent. Now that cities and municipalities are gradually removing the scars of war in primary schools and thus reopening more schools, the teaching profession has become more attractive again. Young people prefer Ghent to Blankenberge or Lier because of the proximity of the university. The redevelopment of the old boarding school gives the students staying there the same freedom as those who have a room in the city.

Since the end of the war, the Belgian Ministry of Public Education has been occupied for several years by ministers from the Socialist Party. It appears that compulsory schooling from ages 6 to 14 is now truly underway. The primary education inspectorate is also working hard to implement the new curriculum which was adopted just before the war and included several proposals from Decroly and the *LIEN* to be implemented in practice. This should be easier in state education and in municipal education in those municipalities where the church authorities lack sufficient influence to thwart the curriculum and co-education. A French-speaking Christian Democrat has recently been appointed head of the ministry but Louis believes his main concern is dealing with subsidy legislation for Catholic schools, ensuring their continued state support, and therefore not imposing too many restrictions on other schools.

Louis picks up a magazine sent to him by a colleague from Blankenberge. It describes the initiative Walter Corti took in Switzerland before the end of the war to build a shelter for orphans

and victims of that war. This center would function as a kind of children's village. In 1946, the municipality of Trogen donated four and a half hectares of land to the newly established *Vereinigung Kinderdorf Pestalozzi.* Along with several other educators, Elisabeth Rotten and Marie Meierhofen support the association in developing the concept of education and upbringing in the children's village.

From the description, Louis deduces that the entire project is closely related to the pedagogical proposals of *LIEN.* The underlying idea is to raise children to be cooperative and mutually understanding global citizens, after which they return to their homelands. Perhaps not a bad idea, Louis thinks, now that the war industry is adapting with lightning speed to what is a disastrous period of peace for warmongers. He recalls the peculiar arguments used last year to defend the establishment of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation NATO. There are increasingly frequent reports about the USSR and domestic persecution, but still, he thinks, it's a bit of an exaggeration to suddenly portray that collection of republics as humanity's most dangerous enemy. In America and Europe, too, there are many figures who demonstrate how they wish to impose their will on people and nations.

Whatever.

The children' s village adopted the ladybug as its symbol. War orphans from surrounding countries come to Trogen and are cared for by volunteers from various countries. Children from the same country are brought together in one house, allowing them to speak their native language in a homely atmosphere. This facilitates their return to their home countries after their education is complete.

The school places a strong emphasis on exchange and cooperation between children of different backgrounds. Some lessons are taught in their native language, while others are taught in German. According to the magazine's journalist, there are already children from France, Finland, Greece, Poland, Austria, and Germany, and two new houses for children from Great Britain will be added this

year.
Louis takes some notes. A few days later, they prove useful during the visit of an inspector whom he knows to be a strong advocate of the 1936 curriculum. As soon as Louis mentions Trogen, the man mentions another orphanage in De Panne, for Flemish orphans and run by Jean Haccuria and his spouse. Jean is friends with André Messens from Vorst, and together they had already participated in several meetings in France organised by the ICEM, *Institut Coopératif de L'École Moderne*, founded shortly after the war, the inspector explains. Both men met Célestin Freinet there. Louis also learns about the activities in Wallonia by the teachers' association *Éducation Populaire* and that some are thinking of a Flemish Modern School Movement for public schools. This concerns teachers who, like Freinet, have reservations about the *LIEN* which, in response to transmission education, pays too much attention to unofficial schools, which immediately means that it is less easy for children of the people to come into contact with dialogical education.
He himself knows that there is interest among both the teachers at the Normal School and at Ghent University in organising study days focused on the ideas of the New School. Perhaps this would be a good start to hear different voices regarding pedagogical options not only from the LIEN staff in Geneva, but also from Dewey, Montessori, and Freinet.

In Koksijde, Lucien is busy relaunching the brickworks he still manages. His patent for improving the manufacturing process for a lightweight brick with a porous and cellular structure is now valid not only in Belgium but also in the Netherlands and France. He is establishing new commercial contacts and is exploring opportunities in Southern Europe and North Africa.
Although Jeanne officially lives with her parents, she has, in fact, moved in with her new best friend. Both young women occasionally visit Koksijde to enjoy the dunes and the beach, but her contact

with the rest of the family is rather sparse. When a cousin invites Jeanne to her wedding, she thinks this is a good opportunity to introduce John, whom she had met some time earlier. Jeanne arranges with her father that they will only show up after the church ceremony. She leaves it unclear whether this is simply because she cannot be there on time or because she does not wish to participate in the church ritual. Lucien knows his daughter often takes a radical stance on church matters. He himself does not view a marriage as a church matter either. Ultimately, it is not a political agreement among royal families, where the church's blessing in the Christian world is a kind of guarantee for the commitment entered into. But if the bride and groom wish to confirm their union in church, that's their business, he believes. And since they consider the ceremony important, he's happy to attend, even though he personally has no religious affiliation with this or any other religion.

So, Jeanne and John enter the banquet hall just as everyone is sitting down. Naturally, the family glances curiously at this newcomer, who has clearly managed to please Jeanne. The meal itself isn't much different from pre-war custom, except for the appetizer of Zeeland oysters. There is velouté soup, turbot with mousseline sauce and potatoes, veal sweetbreads with mushrooms in cream sauce, fruit sorbets, roast beef with a vegetable wreath and golden croquettes, Brussels chicken with salad and mayonnaise or with applesauce, fruit, and coffee.

After coffee, the young people sit together. John is asked about his studies, but he remains vague in his answers. He only mentions that he switched from medicine to Romance languages this year. He mainly talks about the University Flying Club. He's very enthusiastic about his flights under the guidance of an instructor, but now he' s allowed to take off and land himself, in preparation for the exam to get his pilot license. But it is Jeanne who provides the big surprise: despite all the opposition and negative comments,

she left Romance philology to study mathematics. Her dream of becoming an engineer is no longer possible. She wants to become a math teacher, and this is mainly due to her fond memories of her own math teachers during her high school years.

Because Jeanne shows a keen interest in education matters, she is quickly welcomed into John's home. Louis, in particular, enjoys talking with Jeanne about his mother and her grandmother's experiences as teachers in Kelmis. Jeanne is interested not only in their commitment as women, but also in how they organized their work in the barn. Both Louis and Jeanne are convinced that the conservative figures of Catholic Flanders often obstruct pluralistic schools. Jeanne's reasoning stems from the more anarchist-socialist background she inherited from her father, while Louis has a more non-doctrinaire liberal perspective, with an occasional anarchist note. John primarily listens and reflects on what he hears during the long bicycle rides he undertakes to visit friends and family. Early 1951 John receives his license to pilot single-engine aircraft in daylight and visual flight. He remains a member of the Ghent University Flying Club but abandons his university studies. The many conversations between Jeanne and Louis gradually led to his growing interest in everything related to public education, both with children and adults. He starts training as a literary regent, which gave him the opportunity to teach a wide range of subjects in lower secondary education. Personally, he is particularly interested in geography and history, but he also will be entitled to teach Dutch and French. Gradually, he completely distances himself from the Catholic upbringing his mother had given him.

Jeanne's friend from Ghent recently met Mateo, a young Spaniard who, like her, is studying Romance philology. He often tells stories about the Catholic Church in Spain and neighbouring Portugal. According to him, it is led by very conservative traditionalists who see local dictators as a guarantee for perpetuating a strong division

between the different classes. Mateo claims that illiteracy is even more widespread in Portugal than in Spain. Since the beginning of the century, he says, the number of illiterates in Spain has fallen from more than half the population to about 15%. In Portugal, 80% of the population was illiterate at the beginning of the century, and 75% at the start of the last war. Mateo cites an interview with Portuguese dictator Salazar in 1933 in which the man declared: "*Considero mais urgente a constituição de vastas elites do que ensinar o povo a ler."* (I consider building a large elite more urgent than teaching the people to read.) Yet, even from conservative quarters, there are now calls for a better structured national education. An ambitious plan has been launched in Portugal called the *Centenary Plans.*The plural refers to the eighth-century foundation of the Portuguese kingdom and the independence regained from Spain three centuries ago. In concrete terms, this means that a primary school will be built in every village in the country. With this, the government claims to be tackling illiteracy, including by increasing compulsory school from three to four years, as soon as the number of new classrooms allows. Since 1927, compulsory school had been shortened to the first grade of primary education (three school years). Furthermore, the curriculum for rural areas was narrowed.

Later Jeanne talks about this with Louis, who says that members of the *LIEN,* but also those of other international education institutions generally explain that this kind of centralised school expansion primarily serves to gain better control over what is taught to the population. And, Louis notes, this kind of control isn't just a desire of conservative dictators. Ultimately, such centralised and controlled programs are also popular in planned economies like the Soviet Union, if you read the critics who raise many questions about the Stalin-led Central Committee. Moreover, is this kind of central control not the dream of every more conservative government, just about anywhere in the world that calls itself democratic, but immediately repairs every where the slogan "*the majority is right*"

instead of working on a basis of broad platforms on which people with different ideas can live together?

Louis manages to gather some more information under his war contacts. Father Alfredo, who lived with them for a while to support resistance fighters during the war, occasionally sends information about life in Portugal. The letters also occasionally include a newspaper from *A Voz do Operário.* Louis learns the association has now around 40,000 members and that, since shortly before the war, there have also been children's libraries in its various schools, which currently have 2,300 pupils.

According to the Portuguese Ministry of Education, of the 650,000 children at compulsory school age, 609,000 are actually in school. Louis doubts the accuracy of these figures, especially when he reads in the same report intended for UNESCO that primary school lasts five years, which in practice is not the case for many.

Father Alfredo also brings news from Pernambuco, Brazil. For several years now, Paulo Freire has been the director of the Department of Education and Culture of the Social Services Department in the state of Pernambuco. The thirty-year-old Paulo studied law, as well as phenomenology and psycholinguistics. Rather than working as a lawyer, he taught Portuguese at a secondary school for a while, after which he began working with poor, illiterate people.

This son of a military police captain had himself endured a period of great poverty during the 1929 Great Depression. His contact with the poor led him to say, writes Father Alfredo, that in his country, those in power keep the poor ignorant and the schools achieve little, primarily because those in power ignore the real problems of the poor.

Louis believes that ill-trained or arrogant rulers, no matter where in the world, pay little attention to the problems of the poor. Those are often simply seen as labourers, a kind of extension of the machine or tool they wield.

The Kingdom of Belgium has its own concerns and is renaming the *Eugène Ysaÿe Competition* to *Queen Elizabeth Competition.* Furthermore, the entire nation, with widely differing views, holds opinions about who is ultimately worthy of bearing the title of King of the Belgians. Prince Regent Karel stands no chance, especially now his brother Leopold has been legally required to relinquish his royal duties. Leopold's minor son Prince Boudewijn has been Prince Royal for a year now. The whole controversy still revolves around the various interpretations regarding Leopold's attitude in 1940, when, like his father in 1914, he first wanted to retain command of the army and then capitulated to the German occupiers. Moreover, a segment of the population does not forgive him for remarrying during the occupation while officially under house arrest abroad. Over the past year, this entire intrigue has caused such tension in Belgium that there has even been talk of a risk of civil war. Louis believes this is somewhat exaggerated. When Jeanne talks to him about it, Louis says he sees this as another sign that those in power are more interested in working on blind representation than on improving participation. Some time later, Jeanne will understand that he is, in a sense, paraphrasing a quote from John Dewey. Louis notes that there's more talk about the whole issue and the murder of the unfortunate Lahaut who would have shouted *Long live the Republic!* when the Royal Prince took the oath in August, then about the renewed conflict between schools between those who advocate a generalisation of the right to knowledge and those who ultimately want to reserve that knowledge for an elite.

In the summer of 1952, Jeanne has completed the first half of her training as a math teacher. She is visiting John and his parents. Her youngest sister's wedding is in a few weeks, and Jeanne has resolved to teach John to dance better. This leads to some hilarious moments, with Hans, now fifteen, proving to be a better dancer than his brother. Jeanne threatens to take Hans to the wedding

instead of John…
After one of the dance sessions, using the gramophone in the library of Louis' official residence, Jeanne browses the bookshelves. Her eye falls on the name Dewey and she picks up a book titled *Dewey, School and Society*. Then Louis enters the room and she says:
"This book has the same birth year as John".
Louis smiles: "Yes, I don't know if John ever told you, but I convinced Graciete and her family to give him that name because of what I learned as a student about John Dewey and his ideas. I still consider him a great educator. He passed away last month, but I think he'll be talked about for a long time to come."
"Why?" asks Jeanne.
"He has been very concerned with the relationship between schools and democratic forms of government. In doing so, he stated, among other things, that the essential aspect of democracy is not the *representation*, but the *participation*. This does connect with the proposals of both the *LIEN* as the ICEM to actively involve children in their learning process and the school organisation and so you understand why I find Dewey such an interesting figure."
"So John is John because Dewey was John," Jeanne jokes.
"Yes, that's right. But I should actually tell you something more. My mother died young, just after the end of the war in 1919. Just like you, she was called Jeanne. And just like you, she was committed to general education. As I told you before, she wanted, just like her grandmother, to encourage the children to develop their own projects. She first heard about Dewey when she was on a study trip to Great Britain, to visit some *active schools* as they called themselves."
"So Dewey also influenced your mother's way of working?" asks Jeanne.
"My mother's, but also some predecessors of the *LIEN* and in a sense also of the ICEM. I'm thinking of Ligthart, for example, but also of a fellow of your region. Edward Peeters was a teacher in Oostende; he

died a few years before the second world war. My mother and I were in touch with him for a long time.
Now John says, “Can you tell me something more, Father, about this grandmother of mine whom I never knew?”
“I can do better,” Louis replies, walking to one of the library shelves and picking up a notebook. “Here are the notes my mother wrote at the end of her life. I’d be happy to lend them to you if you’re interested.” Louis hands them the little book he read as a young man at his mother’s bedside (See *Leaden Times: What Jeanne told Louis*).
Shortly afterward, John and Jeanne disappear to the coast for further dancing preparations for Jeanne’s sister’s wedding.

The menu is a bit more refined than the first wedding meal they ate together. It looks like this: Oysters, Oxtail Claire, Lobsters in Belle-Vue and Heart of Lettuce, Crown of *Cambacérès* Sweetbreads, Roast Pheasant, Calville Compote and Dauphine Potatoes, Ice Cream Bombe, *Hyménée* Cake, Fruits and Desserts.
John is happy to see Lucien again. Before and after the wedding, he spends some time at the brickworks. He looks at the building projects for which Batiforvit supplies the building blocks. Lucien tells him that the CELKA sandstone blocks are now often exported to Spain and that he plans to travel to Morocco with the company’s managing director in the coming months. He explains that the brickworks have come a long way. As a result of the last war, the company went bankrupt. It is now a public ltd company, in which local investors have invested. Although he is very enthusiastic about the patents obtained, which have translated into larger orders as the building block becomes better known, he is personally less happy that the new sales market is in a country like Spain and its protectorate, Morocco. The *convivial anarchist* as he describes himself, finds it difficult to conduct financial transactions in that country, governed by a dictator with the help of very conservative

rulers. But he is a factory manager, he has a good product with interesting properties for the southern climate, and he is also accountable to the company's general meeting. After all, he is *a cog in a capitalistically organized world* he adds, and that often leads to huge contradictions. He has been commissioned to investigate how the patent can be obtained not only in Southern Europe, but also in several Spanish-speaking countries in South America. To that end, the patent office here contacted an agency in Madrid that claims to specialise in these kinds of matters for the Spanish-speaking world.

After the summer, John begins his final year of studies as a literary regent, and Jeanne starts the first of two degree years in mathematics. Jeanne still lives with her girlfriend in a suburb of Ghent. There's a direct tram connection to the nearby Normal School so she often visits the Demeester family. John's brother Hans enjoys her visits because she always has time to look at his new creations and even taste them, now that he's starting to showcase his talents as a future pastry chef. Louis also greatly appreciates Jeanne's visits. Since reading Jeanne Teacher's notebook, she enjoys listening to Louis' stories about his mother. Jeanne, John, and Louis spend a lot of time in the back kitchen. Now that there's less staff available, Louis often does the cooking himself. Graciete is often unwell and spends most of her time lying on the large armchair in the living room. In fact, she only brightens up during the weekly visit of her brother-sexton, who succeeded their father in the main church of the important parish where the rest of the family still lives.

Louis can still be surprisingly playful, and the former teacher often appears in his stories. One day, John asks in the Tienen dialect if Louis doesn't regret leaving the classroom. Louis replies "*What had to be, had to be*," but adds that at the Normal School he can help to interest young people in general knowledge and knowledge transfer, thus counteracting the superficiality caused, sometimes

consciously but often unconsciously, by culturally ill-formed frameworks, both in public services and businesses. They are far too easily influenced by purely economic motives for profit and what he calls superficial purely cost-benefit analyses. He adds jokingly that this isn't his interpretation of liberalism at all. Jeanne finds it rather amusing that she sees quite a few parallels between this non-doctrinaire liberal and the "convivial left-wing anarchist" there in Koksijde. Sometimes it seems as if her convivial anarchist nature thrives in a world that is once again increasingly dominated by capital and increasingly less open to humanist ideas. On the fringes of this global movement, small groups continue to work for popular education, community colleges, and participatory learning in associations and cooperatives. All in all, she observes that both John's and her own father discreetly join this small group. Like other young people her age, who experienced the war as children and adolescents, she has since shown her support for groups and people who, during the war, consistently resisted the arrogance of the occupying forces and the erosion of freedom of expression. But like many people of her generation, she now recoils from some of these groups, now that they seem to blithely assume that the erosion of freedom of expression can be prevented by introducing a different kind of restriction. She is convinced that arrogance is not silenced by countering it with another kind of arrogance. And that is apparently what is happening right now, both in the United States and the Soviet Union. In both cases, she sees rulers imposing themselves on states and peoples for imposed unification, using different mechanisms to achieve the same goal: whoever took power wants to maintain it, whether it be political, financial, or economic power.

Jeanne believes that the only solution is more general education for all population groups, with a lower threshold for arts, culture, and science. Raising compulsory schooling to the age of 15, as proposed by Education Minister Pierre Harmel, could be a small step in the

right direction. Unfortunately, she tells Louis, this government decision, in her view, is yet another strategy to transfer more public money to Catholic schools, rather than a genuine concern for developing pedagogical proposals that would meet Comenius' *absolutely all knowledge for absolutely everyone* After all, it's not enough to simply decide that everyone can learn longer. The teaching staff also needs guidance to move away from the classic mass instruction model for young children and adolescents if they want to keep their eagerness to learn. And apart from the inspectors who continue to promote the 1936 curriculum, few are doing anything about it. You can count those followers of Célestin Freinet on one hand. The *Reform movement* neither really recovered after the war. Jeanne and Louis hear few, if any, practical reports in Flanders about Pestalozzi, Steiner, or Montessori. If such practices exist, their practitioners are very discreet. A few reports of small private initiatives do emerge from Wallonia. In Brussels, the Decroly school naturally remains active, especially after it has finally emerged from the difficult years of the occupation and is now gradually expanding.

Both Jeanne and John are amused by the way Mathieu Corman provokes the universal defenders of morality. The story is two years old. After several allegations that the bookstore is once again offering banned or morally offensive books for sale, the display window in Knokke features an art book about Goya, "coincidentally" with a copy of the painting *The Naked Maja.* This went too far for the Bruges court, and the bookstore owner is charged with the crime of indecent assault. But the story does not end there. When Mathieu Corman appeared in court, his defense is another provocation. He brings Spanish postage stamps depicting the same painting, asking whether the Bruges prosecutor's office would accuse General Franco of pornography. The trial drags on for two years, but on February 13, 1953, the bookseller is acquitted.

This acquittal comes just after a major winter storm that claimed many lives in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen and submerged almost the entire Belgian coast. Oostende's downtown (fishing quarter and shopping streets around the Central Square), as well as Leopold Park, were also largely flooded. In the Ostend bookstore, 75 cm of dirty saltwater stands between counters and toppled bookshelves. That single day, the water destroyed 22,000 books. John ironically notes that the North Sea is a more skilled inquisitor than the Belgian courts when it comes to destroying books that are not wanted by everyone.
But the defenders of morality continue to make themselves heard. The year after the great flood, Jeanne writes John — who had meanwhile begun his military service — that Corman briefly showcased the book *Histoire d'O* on display, highlighting Leonor Fini's illustrations. The Bruges court seizes a whole stack of books labeling it as pornographic. In Oostende one hears that Mathieu Corman is getting a new batch from the publisher in Paris. When Lucien brings this up to the manager Kermarrec, he winks…

In early March 1953, news arrives from the Soviet Union that Joseph Stalin died. This is received with mixed feelings by the socialist and communist parties and sympathisers worldwide. The most orthodox followers of Soviet policy open their condolences registers and highlight the commitment of Stalin's inner circle to policies aimed at massive industrial modernisation and the development of grand school projects, thus justifying the thesis of the development of socialism in a single state. Other Marxists blame Stalin for the gradual slide toward state-driven capitalism that clearly did not benefit the well-being of its inhabitants. Socialists and social democrats considered Stalin's death the end of a Leninist-Stalinist era in Eastern Europe. Whether this would be followed by a more capitalist or a more cooperative policy based less on economic criteria remains to be seen. There is now broad consensus

among progressives and their organisations that the humanistic development of a society not based on economic criteria of possession and enrichment will be difficult as long as there are interest groups for whom possession, power, and the oppression of others — in whatever form — are the base of their worldview. John and Jeanne, moreover, remain cautious when they hear about the words *progressive organisation*. John often perceives what he labels as "false pluralists" who arrogantly impose their own opinions on others instead of forming cooperative organisations guided by the guarantee of freedom of action and thought for everyone.

But John has other things on his mind. After completing his studies in July of last year, he was called up for military service, which currently lasts 18 months. In August, he undergoes the general training of all recruits at the Arlon barracks, in the far south of the country. According to John, this often involves pointlessly crawling through mud and sludge, only to then have weapons, uniforms, and shoes shined for the subsequent inspection. The trouble is this also determines whether or not one can go on weekend leave. In his first letters about the perils of basic training, John mentions standing guard on boggy ground which gives him inflamed feet or eczema. Nevertheless, he does not want to report sick so as not to jeopardise his weekend leave. A conversation with Lucien about his wartime experience, where young men were sent to the front with little or no training, only partially convinces him of the necessity of his own training. He believes soldiers' training is still based on past wars. Louis then says that the positive side of this is that it could mean that the military leadership assumes that wars are indeed a thing of the past. John becomes quite angry at this without seeing the ironic twinkle in Louis' eyes. "How can his father say such a thing," John grumbles, "when one sees displays of power in various places; just look at Indochina, where French troops are waging a neo-colonial war in the hope of retaining what the

government considers legitimate French possessions, against the will of the local population."

"Moreover, there's a rumour going around that there's a constant threat of war hanging over all the countries that joined NATO," John continues. "I have absolutely no desire to participate in the occupation of German territory and yet there's a good chance that after the briefing in Arlon, I'll be sent to Soest or whatever-the-name-of-the-village is to play would-be wars with the Americans. And since tensions between the American and Soviet leaders have increased even more after the literal closure of the borders between the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic, I feel even more strongly that we're being straw men for the American military leadership."

"Are you done yelling?" Louis asks. "Then I can suggest you inquire about how to validate your literary regent diploma at the training center in Arlon itself. Perhaps you could be useful for those recruits who want to use military service to complete their lower secondary education."

John immediately calms down: "You know, the idea only of ending up somewhere in Germany and not being able to take the train to Koksijde or Ghent during the weekends when I don't have a service is unbearable." Louis nods. He knows very well that these kinds of obligations can be a heavy burden.

Lucien understands it even better. He rarely speaks about his experiences in two wars but one Sunday afternoon, when he's taking an unhappy John to the station, there's such a moment. He briefly mentions the soldiers on the Yser River who never knew in advance when an attack would take place and therefore suddenly lost those few days behind the front lines were they could have bathed, caught up on sleep, read letters, or written to people they hadn't seen in a long time. John listens, somewhat bewildered, thinking to himself that while he has to swallow that sour apple, Lucien should have had to swallow a whole apple tree. And then he

recalls their conversation about how wars primarily create victims among the young population, who often don't know in advance what they're getting into, whether they're staunch patriots who volunteer for military service or boys called up when they just want to be home and tend to their own little affairs.

After basic training and his promotion to sergeant, John is able to take the exams to work as a non-commissioned officer at the training center in Arlon. His superior had already advised him that a position had become available and that he had every opportunity to fill it. He is especially happy that he does not have to go to Germany. He teaches recruits who had only completed primary school before enlisting. And because history is also on his regent's diploma, from September 1954 onwards he is busy cataloging documents and artefacts from the two European wars of the 20th century. There are plans for a war museum.

In February 1955, John retires from the army. He accepts a temporary position as a French teacher at a Ghent municipal school. But when he is offered the opportunity to go to Oostende a month later to work at the municipal technical school, he didn't hesitate. This brings him closer to Koksijde. Moreover, he can join the local flying club there. He rents an apartment near the institute where he will start after Easter and says goodbye to his Ghent students. Apparently, he made a good impression. He always kept their farewell letter:

Dear Teacher

It's not even the end of the school year; this time it's not the students who are changing, but the teacher who is leaving. Barely a few weeks during which we have been blessed with your presence, and already we must part ways.

However, your time in 3 B was not too short for us to appreciate your good teaching skills.

On behalf of all my comrades and on my self, I would like to thank you for your good advices and your very understanding broad spirit

towards us.
Please accept a small souvenir from all of us and with the whole class I say: Long live Mr. Demeester and goodbye.

A month later, John reads in the newspaper that a mutual support pact was signed in the Polish capital, Warsaw, by the Soviet Union, Albania, Bulgaria, Romania, the German Democratic Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Czechoslovakia. Since the war, Germany has remained divided into various occupied territories. The German Democratic Republic, the part occupied by the Soviet army, was hermetically sealed off from the Federal Republic of Germany, governed by the British and Americans. The Warsaw Pact is now legitimised as a response to the Federal Republic of Germany's accession to NATO.

Meanwhile, a third defense pact is in the works, which a few years later will be known as the Non-Aligned Movement. Governments all want to defend themselves, even though they all say they will never attack.

Naturally, in the circles where Lucien and John move, these recent developments are abuzz discussions confirming that the war hawks are fully engaged in accusing each other of seeking global hegemony. Among John's new friends, some call the Federal Republic of Germany's accession to NATO another scandalous American provocation, a military one this time, following the economic provocation of the Marshall Plan. After all, the most powerful American lobbies and major industrialists were able to achieve their desired industrial enrichment and cultural colonisation through both initiatives. Who still remembers that the Marshall Plan, for example, mandated that at least one third of films in European cinemas must come from American Hollywood?

During discussions with left-wing socialists, John who is of liberal-progressive descent, occasionally struggles with the often-uncritically accepted assumption that everything in countries under Soviet control is good for the people and everything in countries

under American control is bad for them. He points to stories of persecuted protesting citizens. According to his friends, these are simply people still too much under Western influence. He questions whether being under Western influence is inherently bad. He argues that the protests here and there are similar: it's about how leaders and those in power on both sides behave and impose their will without regard for the living conditions of ordinary people. The classic argument for this is the good medical infrastructure in some of the socialist republics. But, he replies, is our medical infrastructure, based on mutual health insurance, really that much worse? He also believes that, just as in our country, when discussing education, people limit themselves too much to citing government-provided data and pay too little attention to what children and young people actually learn during schooling or in primary and secondary schools. He can't resist quoting a statement attributed to the recently deceased theoretical physicist Albert Einstein: "*I only know of two infinite phenomena: the universe and human stupidity. And I'm not entirely sure about the first one.*" John believes one is not born a critical thinker, but that guiding children through their learning process is essential for learning to critically analyse situations. And how can someone who dogmatically postulates that a particular societal model is superior to another still think critically about the model they defend, let alone help others to critically examine it? It's something that will preoccupy John his entire life and constantly makes him reflect on what "being a pluralist" means to him.

Meanwhile, Jeanne has also graduated and quickly obtains a long-term position at one of Oostende's leading public secondary schools. She teaches mathematics, both at the primary and secondary levels. She feels especially accomplished when she organises the class curriculum for numeracy and geometry with the older students.

John often gives her books he finds at Corman's about the history of mathematics. For example, he gives her a first edition of *A Concise History of Mathematics* from Dirk Jan Struik as a gift and also the

somewhat older booklet by Marcel Boll *Les Étapes des Mathématiques (The Steps of Mathematics)* Jeanne also delves into the work of Gaston Bachelard. *La Formation de l'esprit scientifique (The Formation of the Scientific Mind)* is a recurring source of inspiration when she considers lesson plans for exploring mathematical structures with her students. She follows Bachelard's lead in collecting and classifying the methodological, philosophical, and psychological obstacles he identifies as impeding access to knowledge. His typology of these obstacles and its illustration help her. She also observes the futility of repetition, since understanding is not a matter of repetition, but, as Bachelard puts it *'overthrowing the obstacles piled up by daily life'*.

In school, a mistake is too often seen as a fault and a difficulty as an obstacle to be avoided rather than overcome. Deterministic science eliminated these problems, Bachelard believes. The new scientific spirit transforms a corrected error into knowledge and an overcome misunderstanding into understanding. The new educational spirit discovers, behind apparent ignorance, a structure consisting of coherent representations. The student who doesn't know isn't ignorant through negligence or ill will; they are merely subjected to representations that shut them off from other ways of conceiving. Their imagination not only prevents them from seeing and knowing by distracting them from the truth, but also imposes itself violently. You could say there's such a thing as the dynamics of ignorance. Too often, students remain stuck in 18th-century science, where current pedagogical obstacles shed no light on earlier epistemological obstacles. Attributing ill will to failing students reveals the teacher's ignorance, Bachelard adds. And that's precisely what Jeanne thinks. Being understanding as a teacher is therefore not a virtue, but an educational necessity.

By reading Bachelard, Jeanne later learns about the work of Françoise Dolto, about whom she would one day speak to her granddaughter Joana.

John and Jeanne are getting married on Christmas Eve, without a religious ceremony. Jeanne is thus following her parents' footsteps. Just like Lucien's father's more conservative family, Graciete's staunchly Catholic family is also shocked. Jeanne has already decided that any children will not be baptised. She wants to be consistent when opposing to rituals of those who see faith as a social religious dogma and not as a personal necessity.

Moreover, she jokes, we can thus effortlessly unite the wedding meal and Christmas dinner with those family members and friends with whom we enjoy spending the holidays, as we do in other years. John needs considerable diplomacy to convince his mother that this doesn't mean they are angry towards the conservative Catholic wing of the family. They are, of course, welcome at their wedding celebration. Lucien puts it beautifully, as he sees it: they don't reject anyone, but they also don't see why they should be rejected because they don't identify with a church ritual, solely for the sake of others. Moreover, they would truly see that as a lack of respect for those who identify with religious temples.

The wedding meal, eaten on Christmas Eve, is, as bourgeoisie oblige, written in French: *Les fines de Zélande sur Neige* with Gewurtztraminer, *l'Oxtail clair, les Supremes de Sole a L'Orly* with Chateau de Maine 48, *Les Caissettes Vaudoises* with Chateau Clinet 43, *La Dinde Rotie Périgourdine* with Clos de la Margerie 37, *La Timbale de Homard Mauresque* with De Souza Bonville, *La Buche de Noel Glacée*, le Moka, Biscuits et Liqueurs.

After their wedding, John and Jeanne move into an apartment in the quiet village of Mariakerke. Both teach in Oostende. They often meet after work in the city center, usually finishing with a visit to the Corman bookstore on Adolf Buylstraat. John especially enjoys the inspiring conversations with manager Kermarrec. He sees them as an extension of the conversations with his father-in-law. These days, he often talks about the period between the end *19th century AD* and the end of the "Second World War". He debates a

widespread romantic notion that humanity has reached its end point in its quest for knowledge simply because everything is known. Moreover, those in power, but also many scientists, hold what he considers a catastrophic view of education and upbringing. This view is that schools serve only to a limited transmission of what the elite know to the new generations. Furthermore, people prefer to provide the public with spectacle rather than science, and cinema, newsreels, newspapers, radio, and local politics are ideally suited for this. Lucien believes that the National Institute for Radio Broadcasting is contributing to this, now that home cinema is regularly being experimented and for which the name television was coined. He himself much prefers to sit on the balcony of his daughter's apartment with a glass of wine, gazing at the sea in the company of a good conversationalist.

John is confronted almost daily with the fact that the school where he teaches has only a policy of limited knowledge transfer. His colleagues often say they '*cast pearls before swine*' where he notes with dismay that they effectively paint a very negative picture of their students. On the tram, and also on the bus now that the tracks of the city trams are being taken away, there are also students from the school he teaches in. He is struck by how they have fluent and effective discussions about the technical aspects of electric, two-stroke and four-stroke engines in the local dialect. Characteristic of this dialect are the many French and English terms. In class he knows a conversation in Dutch is almost impossible. He cannot enthuse the boys about a more pure Dutch language and many of the texts included in the curriculum do not appeal to them at all. They only become truly interested in Dutch when he suggests they compare engines of two-wheelers, cars, and airplanes, but with the agreement that they use correct Dutch. *Vitessen* becomes *versnellingspook* of -bak (gear lever) or (gearbox), *joint de culasse* wordt koppakking *(*cylinder head gasket), *carter, oliepan pan* (carter), *bougie kaars* candle and '*freings*' remmen (brakes).

Meanwhile, cylinders, air or water cooling, hydraulic lines, and electrical wiring are all receiving the right place in the technical information.

A few months after their wedding, Louis writes to John and Jeanne that he had discovered the English translation of a text by Lev Vygotsky. In the Soviet Union, his writings started to circulate again after Stalin's death. Apparently, researchers and psychologists quickly became interested in what he had written a generation earlier about language development and thinking skills. "*My mother*", he writes, "*would have appreciated his theses. The text I read is from a specialised journal and is not easy to understand. What I did understand is that the findings of this researcher, who died young, are in line with Piaget's observations. He attaches great importance to language development and the associated social interaction. This interaction appears to be the available foundation for guiding children in their development. Intellectual development is therefore not helped by the behaviorist model of stimulus and response, which guides the actions of many teachers who support learning processes based on pure instruction with reward and punishment*".

Louis also discusses new community colleges complementary to what the Lodewijk de Raet Foundation offers. The initiative stems from a group of Ghent university lecturers from socialist backgrounds. They are launching the *Verenging voor Volkshogescholen* (Association of Community Colleges) for the popularisation of science and arts. Louis knows that Professor Massart is the chairman. The general secretary is Gustaaf de Leger, a young man living in Oostende. "*Perhaps something for John?*" Louis asks. John talks to Lucien about it and together they contact the local branch of that association. John almost immediately makes a lifelong friend. Lucien is happy to receive invitations to local activities but remains busy expanding Batiforvit. He is experiencing considerable difficulties with the Spanish office for extending their

patents to North Africa and South America. According to some of his contacts some companies are challenging the patents because the same production of cellular sandstone blocks was already in use before Batiforvit entered the Spanish market. Until recently, Lucien had regular visitors from Spain to study local manufacturing and, together with the national patent office, explore the possibility of further protection for his improvements. He sometimes wonders if he'd made a mistake in this regard. But despite the tensions at the company level, Lucien does have a good personal relationship with some of his visitors, which in turn leads to return visits including to Seville. And when, in the autumn of 1957, John and Jeanne announce the birth of Paulo, congratulations arrive from Spain in the form of an acrostic.
Lucien and Charlotte are already on their sixth grandchild, but Louis and Graciete are grandparents for the first time.

At Louis' insistence, the soon-to-be-grandparents spent part of the summer in Oostende. Jeanne has to take it easy, and John isn't exactly the most skilled chef, so Louis spends a lot of time at the greengrocer's, the butcher's and in the kitchen. He also visits the Ostend library where he rediscovers Edward Peeters.
During a visit to Lucien he reads an ironic article in *Canard Enchaîné* about the literacy of children in French schools: "*The school that annoys: when you aren't, you become it, and whoever is already annoyed becomes even more so".* It deals with the explosive situations in the schools of the Parisian suburbs, where teachers and children live completely side by side. In passing, the text mentions the former communist Freinet. Georges Snyders and others attack him in an article in the communist magazine *La Nouvelle Critique (The New Criticism)*. Furthermore, Fernande Seclet-Riou, general secretary of the *French New Education Group (GFEN)* accuses Freinet of ignorance and megalomania. According to the GFEN, Freinet is not the answer to the problems in the French education system.

Makarenko and the Soviet Union school are the shining examples. Louis chuckles. First, the *LIEN* and *New Education* was a rather anarchist, sometimes socialist, organisation where non-doctrinaire liberals also found refuge. With the rise of rural boarding schools, socialists quickly came to see that the *New Education* people had too many bourgeois tendencies. The then-communist Célestin Freinet increasingly accused the French section of being impractical, at a time when intellectuals from the Communist Party were increasingly gaining a grip on the GFEN. These previously intolerant figures from the world of educational sciences cleverly ousted him and today present themselves as the saviours of the fatherland with Makarenko and, perhaps, also with Pistrak's labour schools. He wonders somewhat skeptically whether they dream of sending Freinet to a labour camp for retraining, or whether they simply want to get rid of him.

Meanwhile, Freinet himself states during an ICEM congress: "*Officialise our techniques would be the worst thing to do*", something Louis can agree with.

"But does that mean that we will never be able to create a public school where children and teachers work together to develop the curriculum and tailor it to their interests?" asks Jeanne.

"My son has a more radical vision than I do have these days," Louis says, laughing, "but I must admit that everywhere, even in the scientific world, I see the personal desire for power taking precedence over a global humanist view of Knowledge. In this particular French case, I suspect that some people think they are reincarnations of the ideologists of the 1789 Revolution."

"I haven't read much by or about that Célestin Freinet," says John, "but I do know that working with children and young people is a good way to understand that teachers don't learn to listen and engage in dialogue through some kind of Lancaster instruction or recipes. As a teacher, you probably learn primarily through error analysis and practical discussions and less, if at all, through

applying a preparatory training that you're not allowed to change. And you have to admit, Dad, even at the Normal School, students are too much encouraged to make what I call closed preparations. By that, I mean preparations that are supposed to reduce the pupils' questions to just what the teacher is supposed to convey in a given lesson. In my opinion, quite a few university educational scientists who advocate for dialogue are just as well only interested in imposing their own perspectives ex cathedra on their students."

Jeanne nods. "I'm finding, at least now, in my early practice, that I can, let's say, more easily guide my students to mathematical language when I continually work with them to figure out where, when, and why logical fallacies creep into their reasoning. I'm only at the beginning, but I already feel how the experience I'm gaining ties in, not only with my basic scientific training but also with my upbringing at home and my general life experience."

"Comenius called for a school where everyone could learn everything," Louis says now, "and that request was rarely, if ever, addressed. Only when the urban population grew did those in power see the school as a solution, not for imparting knowledge, but for controlling the poor. At a certain point, the school was presented as the instrument for teaching everyone to read and write. But this mass process failed in many places. People wanted, in both religious and secular settings, standardised learning processes, where some applied a false principle of equality, while others, less hypocritical, simply stated openly that they wanted to control exactly what was read and learned in school. I received another example of this from Portugal. The institution *A Voz do Operário* as my wartime friend Alfredo occasionally tells me works now with 40 schools. Six of them are private schools; all the others have a working contract with the institution. In the dictatorial context in which they operate, their only concern is ensuring that working-class children learn to read, in the same way and with the same texts as children from bourgeois circles. Meanwhile, children

from both the official and clandestine elites attend urban colleges. This gives them more leeway; they can go abroad. That Brazilian Paulo Freire whom Alfredo also told me about, seems to point out on the political nature of illiteracy. You can teach people to read and still keep them illiterate. Literacy is more than deciphering or copying.

A personal consequence of this conversation is that for Jeanne and John, Paulo is as natural a proper name to choose for as John was for Louis' son. The Demeester branch of the family continues to express its appreciation, through naming, for those who view education and schooling as a right to participation, not as a duty to attend school. And that is apparently exactly what is happening everywhere in this second half of the 119th hectoyear: a global compulsory school to promote mediocrity is gradually emerging.

Critical voices remain rare. Those who wield the power of the word in the emerging fields of educational science are primarily concerned with proclaiming their own truth, while those in the field have little time to make their voices heard, except among equals, to learn together. In the suburbs of Paris the *Canard* refers to, Fernand Oury meets with several other teachers who choose to write monographs and analyse them together.

Paulo is one year old when grandfather Lucien suffers a heart attack. He has to take a few weeks off work, and the heart specialist tries to convince him to apply for his pension. After all, he's already 65. Lucien doesn't think about it for long. Batiforvit has celebrated its tenth anniversary with a substantial portfolio containing photos of the many buildings for which the cellular sand-limestone is used throughout Belgium. These include the Societé Générale bank building on Meiserplein in Brussels, the Hotel Terlinck in Koksijde, the television transmitter at the Palace of Justice in Brussels, the *Volkshuis* (People's House) in Oostende, the villa 't Riet in Mariakerke, schools, factory buildings, as well as numerous villas

and apartment buildings in Brussels and on the coast. The collection includes a “Drive Inn” and the URSS cinema complex at this year’s Brussels World Expo. But the patent dispute continues, and he realises he’s too old to lead the company through this complex matter. He lacks the diplomacy, feeling too personally involved, which can make him overexcited, which, according to the doctor, is precisely what he should avoid. So, he and Charlotte decide to move to Oostende where two of his grandchildren live and another is on the way, and take on a more active grandfatherly role.
A few months earlier, John had bought a 2CV Citroen Limousine Luxe. The brand-new car costed 60,000 Belgian francs and has a 2-cylinder, 425 cc engine. During their move from Koksijde to Oostende Lucien and John are somewhat surprised to discover that they can fit slightly more cargo into that small 2CV than Lucien’s Ford Mercury. Of course, the Ford, with its 3.7-liter engine, is faster back and forth, so it gains in speed what it loses in handling.
A few weeks later, someone else is surprised. The Oostende-Brussels motorway has been finished for two years. So John and Jeanne decide to visit Louis’ cousins in Tienen. But in Leuven, they broke down and had to leave the car at a garage. The taxi driver who takes them to Tienen is very surprised when he discovers he can’t fit all the luggage from the 2CV into the trunk of his Mercedes.

Now that Charlotte and Lucien live in Oostende, Jeanne and John visit them more regularly. They talk about the decolonizing world and the persistent resistance to that decolonisation from both previous and newer occupiers. In Cuba, a group led by Fidel Castro seized power on January 1, 1959, after a previous failed coup. Cuba had become a kind of backyard for many North Americans in recent years, and Lucien anticipates problems. He assumes that the animosity between the new Cuban policy and the United States establishment will lead the Soviet leaders to support Cuba, as is happening elsewhere, both in Southeast Asia and in African regions,

where resistance to colonising powers is gradually growing. The large mining operations and plantations rarely benefit the local population, and the exploitation is even more acute there than where the exploitative owning groups settle. Yet even there, workers, farmers, and miners are poorly paid and, despite unions and associations, are defenceless against joint-stock companies that operate for the benefit of capital and profit for investors without serious concern for the working class.

Jeanne raises her eyebrows. “Do you believe, Daddy,” she asks, “that poorly paid and poorly treated workers who are overworked become some kind of fascists working together?”

“Fascists working together? A fascist cooperative? Naturally, groups form themselves and point the finger at an existing or imaginary enemy to destroy them, but these are usually highly hierarchically organised groups, with a demagogue at the forefront. And demagogues like to give totalitarian-tinged speeches. They abuse religion, philosophy, or more sociologically oriented analyses in doing so. Solidarity becomes a kind of group defence and is always ***against*** someone: against those who think differently, against those of a different religion, against those who control capital, but above all against an easily recognisable target audience. Just look at how warnings are issued here today against Moroccan or Algerian workers, against Italians, Spaniards, or Portuguese. Foreign workers are guilty for the crisis, not the profit-hungry investors. Twenty-five years ago, once again, the Jews were largely responsible in Germany. They were blamed for the crisis then. And now some of them blame others to live where they are allowed to live, longe from Europe and Russia…but the calendar we use begins when they were accused of having the leader of the Christians murdered.”

John smiles. “Yes, we know that story by now... every spring we hear it again, whether we want to hear it or not.”

“But,” Lucien continues, “ultimately, these kinds of stories and dangerous fables are mainly a way of cultivating a local sense of

community, in the sense of '*we are good and pure and the others are the evildoers*' Your father, John, likes to quote Dewey who says that democracy with has to do with participation and not with representation. The underlying idea is that such participation entails the acquisition of knowledge. We'll have to wait to know whether the new leadership in Cuba will enable participation or simply be a new representation of a people who have little to do with the changes… But why this strange question, Jeanne?"
"I read a comment from Célestin Freinet regarding schools which reads as follows: '*Demain il sera trop tard. Les enfants qui sont dans nos classes seront dans 10 ans les citoyens que nous aurons préparés. L'école que nous dénonçons autorise et même prépare les fascistes (Tomorrow it will be too late. Over 10 years the children in our classrooms will be the citizens we have prepared. The school we denounce authorises and even prepares fascists)*.' Today I understand better the last sentence. The school that doesn't train for participation is the school that creates followers for fascists, that forms the breeding ground for populists and fascists to rally large groups of poorly informed and uncritically thinking people behind them.

John thinks back to this conversation about participation, democracy, liberation and independence when he walks past Corman's bookstore some time later and sees how a large part of the window display is taken up by the sensational book *La Question (The Question)*, by Henri Alleg. It tells a horror story about the torture of Algerians on the orders of the French army, which is why the book was confiscated by the southern neighbours. When we talk about knowledge, he ponders, we naturally think of science, culture, art, and the invitation to children to participate in science, art and culture. But we must also consider the information filtered by those who claim to hold power, as soon as that information casts those in power in a negative light.

What John never knew was that the still rather cosmopolitan city of Oostende was visited in that period by Ives Montand and Simonne Signoret. The couple, known as progressivists in the music and film worlds, visited Corman, and Simonne Signoret later wrote about the bookstore and its manager, Kermarec: '*The bookstore was spacious and luxuriously furnished, like all the buildings and shops in that Biarritz at the North Sea. The bookseller was not a young man; he looked like a true book lover, not a book vendor. I asked for three copies of 'The question'. He studied me for a moment and nodded. "*You'd do well to take three,*" he said, "*since you come from a country where you can no longer read books.*" He said this without blinking, with deep contempt and a great, cold anger. When he gave me my change, he added, "*And what do you do, besides buying books, about what's being done in your name?*" I mumbled, "*Not much.*" He didn't say "*Good-bye, ma'am"*, ignored me completely as I left the store, and picked up the book he'd been reading before I came in.'*

In 1960, John leaves the municipal education system. He receives an offer to join a group of young educational advisors for a newly developed parastatal institution for small entrepreneurs and shopkeepers who hire apprentices. The young people recruited normally were filtered out of secondary technical education as soon as the theoretical pressure of the curriculum increases. Failure at school, as always, is a personal matter, not an institutional problem. The young people disappear from the classroom, and the general education model is not to be tinkered. The heralds of the false principle of equality simply said: "They had their chance and didn't take advantage of it." This was a kind of confirmation of an educational model for the upper classes, in which children from modest backgrounds were only given a place "if they deserved it." Some of John's colleagues ask him in surprise why on earth he wants to concern himself for working with "failed" students. He replies ironically: "*Perhaps you haven't heard, but since the end of last*

war, the gassing of subhumans has been completely forbidden." This is not at all appreciated.

With the working group he joins, he tries to develop a model that combines practical training, vocational training, and education for general knowledge. Yet he is aware that the working group ultimately legitimises the filtering out of young people from a system that falsely presents itself as the universal answer to a right. There should be no career choice after a universal education in knowledge and science. The forced choice is imposed earlier by society on those for whom the system is unable to respond.

Louis notes: "You actually have a kind of Maria Montessori proposal for adolescents."

"How did you come up with that?" asks John in surprise.

"Well, I had to think of the *New Education Movement* and Montessori's role in it. She died last year, and so quite a bit is being written about her legacy. I note that there is indeed an attempt to better respond to the individuality of children, in this case adolescents, but only for that limited group that… *does not correspond to the system*. What are the schools doing for children and young people within compulsory schooling age to actively involve them all, to develop competencies, and to connect them with knowledge? Not enough, I say. Once again, the idea of first exploring all aspects of human knowledge as broadly as possible before choosing a profession is dismissed as a kind of utopia. That's easier than finding ways to work actively, interactively, and in dialogue with everyone. With Freinet, I would say that it's not about *keeping everyone **in** the school desks*, but *to get everyone **out** the school* and to work practically with everyone. And when I say cooperation, I don't mean the state-socialist variant of collectively implementing a centrally planned market economy, but rather asking questions that lead to projects whose implementation then involves the entire groep in gathering knowledge useful for the entire group.

While relative peace reigns within Europe and there are no open armed conflicts between states, this is globally far from the case. In Southeast Asia, a war is raging in Vietnam fuelled by the growing hatred of communists from the leaders of the United States of America and the major industrial lobbies. In Tibet, the local population is being harassed by the communist leaders of China, primarily for religious reasons. In Africa, the governments of European colonising countries are through their policies increasingly causing armed conflicts which are causing suffering for the local population. Local groups and leaders are taking up arms, in some cases simply as a desperate defence against the aggression they have endured. The reaction is immediate and with varying degrees from Portugal to the Netherlands through Belgium, France, Spain, and Great Britain, governments are once again mobilising young men to fight in overseas territories, provinces, or colonies, as European rulers refer to occupied territories. In the United States of America, the military leadership and government are calling for a massive take-up of arms against all and sundry who is '*a danger to American values and to the American economy*'. In the beginning many young people believe they will 'liberate' those distant peoples.

Kinderdorf Pestalozzi receives in addition to the European children orphans from Tibet, Korea, Tunisia, Ethiopia, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Lebanon. John notes children from Palestine are not mentioned. Yet, since 1948, there has been an unrelentingly explosive relationship between the population residing in the Palestinian territories and the ever-increasing influx of Jewish immigrants. This migration was legitimised after 1946 by the creation of the state of Israel, achieved by international negotiators who have reservations about migration to their own territories, but not to an area claimed as motherland by three religions. Moreover, there is a fairly long history of bloody conflicts fuelled by small groups of fundamentalists within each of those three religions, John

adds.

As always, John interprets international tensions and armed conflicts as the result of the ongoing struggle between rulers from different parts of the world, using their own experiences with faith or religion as an alibi to conceal their lust for money and property. For John, this lust for money and property has now been reduced to two antagonistic positions, both of which consider property a natural phenomenon. For some, money and property are collectively controlled; for others, individually, giving rise to either a communist-capitalist or a liberal-capitalist mindset. Bu he often jokes they all worship their own golden calf. The leaders of the liberal-capitalists openly show that they reserve the best parts of the calf for themselves, while the leaders of the communist-capitalists pretend to divide the calf equally, but secretly keep the best parts for themselves. John finds it difficult to imagine harmonious relationships among people worldwide without abolishing the very concept of ownership and the belief that money is more than just a standard for facilitating the exchange of goods. Moreover, he believes, if goods are not owned there should be no exchange.

John laughs to himself with an unusual metaphor: cattle are not made up of just *filet mignon*, and not everyone likes *filet mignon*. But if you establish a hierarchy and rank from the best to worst cuts, even making inedible edible, you'll soon have someone deciding who deserves the *filet mignon* and who doesn't. And then the inedible parts are automatically allocated to those without rights, while those even if they prefer *liver* still will claim the *filet*, as it confers a higher hierarchical status. How much better would it be if everyone could simply feed themselves, eating what they most enjoy and sharing with others who enjoy the same part, instead of competing to obtain what they actually don't like?

Jeanne also often laughs at John's parables and metaphors. She herself reflects on pluralism. Since her student days, she has struggled with the way church leaders in Flanders try to maintain

control over the formal institutions that guarantee compulsory education. By “control” she means the way conservative groups using the church try to prevent everyone from having access to the basic knowledge that humanity has acquired over time. She struggles with what she calls the mystifications and omissions skilfully introduced into proposed curricula by authoritarian rulers, but also by the way teachers offer their own interpretations of those curricula. And for Jeanne, this is what she describes as *the paradox of pluralism.* She likes to use set theory to clarify her ideas. To support all children in acquiring knowledge and becoming human, she imagines two sets. There is a socially recognised set **T** of ways of thinking, developed in meeting places, possibly schools. Set **T** contains the human heritage of all hypotheses that make theories in the natural or human sciences possible. Hypotheses differ from each other or even contradict each other, both in the natural and human sciences. There are long-standing hypotheses that suggest a theory and recently developed hypotheses that confirm, refute, or complement such a theory. Set **T** is related to set **P.** Elements of set **P** are all the people who contribute to formulating hypotheses. They can be part of a group, a community, a society, a nation-state, etc. **P** contains subsets. These can be R (rulers), M (minority), C (children), O (oppressed), and so on.

Pluralism consists of encouraging free thinking — some call it critical thinking. After critically reflecting on hypotheses, each individual chooses which hypotheses about the natural sciences they wish to explore or investigate, and which framework or reference they wish to apply in the humanities, examining the sustainability of those hypotheses. In pluralistic contexts, a large number of many-to-many relationships occur.

This is different in non-pluralistic contexts, when the subset R of **P** contains the elements that clearly have the most money, power, votes, powerful myths or religion, etc. Those elements belonging to R tend to impose their chosen hypothesis or frame of reference. In a

non-pluralistic context, it is often recommended to avoid many-to-many relationships. In some situations, relationships **P**\R to **T** are even forbidden relationships. Suppose that Rulers who constitute the majority of a state, regardless of how it was formed, make Roman Catholicism the state religion, then this applies to everyone who is born there or comes to live there. If the majority declares Islam or Buddhism the state religion, this also applies to everyone. Deviations may not be tolerated. The same applies to the adopted economic model, to the rules regarding clothing, hairstyle, sexuality, and so on. Anyone who does not submit must leave (is no longer an element of **P**), whoever is not gone is a potential victim (subset V of **P**), whoever is potential victim is prosecuted in the name of the majority who argue that only relationships assumed by them are correct and who therefore lay down the law.

In pluralistic contexts however, the paradox of the not-many-to-many relationship immediately arises. If pluralism entails no obligatory submission to the vision of elements from subset R, then all frames of reference are possible, even those that impede the speech and action of those who chose a different frame of reference. If these kinds of frames of reference are excluded, then whoever maintains them will consider this an attack on pluralism. Every spiritual leader, a political leader, an economic leader (element of R) thus takes the right to call a pluralistic society non-pluralistic because they do not have the right to think and act freely, which in this specific case means silencing, ridiculing, or belittling others.

Is pluralism a human utopia, or is pluralism a model where subsets R of **P** can be avoided on the premise that there is no room for hierarchies within the group of people who contribute to formulating hypotheses? And can a shared education in diversity, combined with universal access to knowledge, lead to a society in which someone who knows more in one area always complements someone who knows more in another? Can this avoid the temptation for rankings and hierarchy?

This spring, Paulo's sister Anne is born. In a little village deep in the interior of Portugal, Maria Coelho is also born to a couple of young farmworkers. Like most people in rural Portugal, her parents completed three years of primary school before joining the family in the field. Only this year has the schooling period been augmented to four years, after thirty years of universal compulsory education for one grade of three school years. Maria's father is one of the few cattle herders in the village. He oversees herds of a *latifundia* nearby on horseback or mule. The nearest animal market is about twenty kilometers from the village, and the grazing areas are up to fifty kilometers away. On horseback, he is much more mobile than the sheep herders, who usually travel on foot and stay with their flocks for long periods, far from home. Some men are employed in cork harvesting. This is delicate work, and training is typically passed down from father to son. The boys must learn to handle the axes with which they score the bark of the cork oak at specific heights, after which long strips of bark are removed using the axe handle. The wider and longer these strips, the more the buyers pay for them. The women of the village work the land according to the seasons: tending seeds and seedlings in the spring and then successively harvesting grains, chickpeas, broad beans, and olives. Men are also involved in the olive harvest. Maria's mother and aunts are reputed to be good workers at one of the *latifundia* about a two-hour walk from the village. During peak harvest periods, they sleep on the estate. Shortly after Maria's birth, her mother and her sisters arrive for the summer and late summer harvests. She carries the baby in a large shawl. As a day labourer in the fields, she is only paid when she works, and the young family desperately needs the money.

Much further south, Belgian Congo is now the Republic of Congo. In Belgium, the debate revolves around the young king's speech during the independence ceremony. For many, it was deeply unfortunate; for others, it was poorly prepared by the responsible government;

and, according to still others, it was a provocation by those who continue to have interests in mineral exploitation and the plantations established now on paper independent Congo. Defenders of the decolonisation praise Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba for his response, in which he highlights and condemns all the cruel aspects of Belgian colonisation. He says, among other things: "*We have known forced labour in exchange for wages that were far too low to eat enough, to clothe ourselves with dignity, to live in a safe place, or to raise our children as loved ones.'*

All of this contrasts sharply with the social rules Jeanne can rely on. She is entitled to paid maternity leave after Anne's birth. John can attend the free preschool nearby all weekdays. Furthermore, John and Jeanne employ a young woman who not only takes care of the entire household but also cares for the children whenever Jeanne asks. When she returns to school in September, the children are already well accustomed to their surrogate mother during the day.

The doctor has advised Lucien to give up driving. He gives his Ford Mercury to his daughter. She rarely uses it. John regularly travels by train to Bruges or Brussels, where his work offices are located, and on those days, Jeanne takes him to the station in her 2CV before going to school. And on the days when John is on duty visiting employers in the provinces, Jeanne prefers the tram to manoeuvring the big Ford.

That same autumn, a large-scale vaccination campaign against a new variant of the flu virus is launched in several countries for the elderly and chronically ill. Until then, people tried to protect themselves from infection with masks and disinfectants, while social distancing was recommended. Yet, in the last three years, approximately one million people worldwide had died from the virus. The vaccination was intended to prevent further pandemics. This evoked sad memories for Louis. He recounts how millions of people died in 1918 and 1919 during another flu pandemic. He also

recounts his mother's last days on the farm in Tienen. Lucien supplements the stories with a description of the final weeks of the war, when the German army was retreating and soldiers from almost all over the world entered the liberated areas. Both exhausted soldiers and severely weakened civilians easily became infected and died. Only towards the end of 1919 did people gain a sense of this second global catastrophe after the one caused by trench warfare.
John then recounts that on the train he had a conversation with a microbiology specialist who raised the real possibility that such epidemics will increase in the future, simply because potential sources of infection and rapid transmission increase as the world population grows.

Major property owners and authoritarian capitalist rulers are not particularly affected by these kinds of infection centers. They consider all those advocating for self-determination a much greater threat to their interests. This is also the case in Belgium. Here the Lumumba government is constantly being assaulted with the help of US intelligence. The pro-Belgian population of Katanga should be helped to achieve independence from the Republic of Congo. Lucien suspects that major interests in the mining sector are the cause of the barely concealed manipulation here. He is convinced of this after seeing how quickly the coup d'état by the pro-Belgian and pro-American Colonel Mobutu succeeds. Moreover, it is abundantly clear that Lumumba is assassinated under highly suspicious circumstances on February 17th.
When Lucien reads in April about the failed invasion of Cuba's Bay of Pigs by exiles, it's almost certain once again major capitalists are involved. He's convinced that American interests are at stake and that President Kennedy's cautious handling of the case will cost him dearly in the next election.

In March 1961, John exchanges his 2CV for a Simca Aronde.

Although the car cost 89,000 Belgian francs, John only has to pay slightly less than half that amount, thanks to the highly popular 2CV's resale value. John explained that now that the service is expanding and he has to make more and more visits to the provinces, a car with better heating isn't a luxury. Lucien smiles and says that John is well on his way to become a bourgeois left-wing intellectual. John then replies that he doesn't think living naked in a cavern will contribute to a more just society in Belgium and the world.

On May 1, Paul Geheeb dies. Louis notes with gentle irony that for those who once founded the *School of Humanity* this is a very symbolic day to die.

"But that school was not accessible to children of workers," Jeanne counters.

"No, you're right. Paul was a kind of nonconformist from the upper middle class. He wanted to unite all the world's cultures, but at his private school, they had to pay for it…"

"Wasn't that Paul Geheeb connected to the *Movement for the New Education*?" asks John.

"Yes," Louis answers. "He founded the national boarding school that is still known as *Odenwaldschule*. But after the rise of the National Socialists in Germany, he emigrated to Switzerland. There he began working on the idea of an intercultural school. Naturally, this required funding, and during the war years, few people were able to afford the relatively high tuition.

At one point after the war there were plans to work together with the *Kinderdorf Pestalozzi* but ultimately that didn't happen. While the foundation for an intercultural school was there, there weren't funds to further develop the project. Moreover, Corti, the founder of the Children's Village, and Geheeb weren't entirely on the same page. The *School of Humanity* followed its own path and, as far as I know, it owes its viability mainly to the strategic insight of Paul

Geheeb's wife."

In summertime Corman's isn't just a hangout for casual visitors who switch the beach for downtown on windy days, but it also attracts more regulars hoping to chat with Kermarec or other regulars. John walks into the shop and finds himself in the middle of a conversation that's apparently about Hemingway.

"Is it true that Mathieu Corman met him during the Spanish Civil War?" someone asks.

Kermarec confirms and uses the opportunity to point out the various titles by the recently deceased author that the store has available in English, Dutch, and French. It quickly becomes apparent that most of the attendees are unfamiliar with Hemingway's books. Those with children in high school have heard about *The Old Man and the Sea* now that this book has been awarded the Pulitzer Prize and has been included in the canon after Hemingway won the Nobel Prize in 1954. The customers present who consider themselves left-wing, of course, all mention *For whom the bell tolls* although John quietly suspects many never actually read the book. He readily admits that he skipped certain parts. John then concludes that the conversation about Hemingway was merely a sidebar in a discussion about the Wall that bisects Berlin. After all, Berlin belongs partly to the Federal Republic of Germany and partly to the Democratic Republic of Germany. The pros and cons are not new to John. The communist friends swear by the adage of the Soviet Union and the GDR that those who defect to the Federal Republic are lured there by Western propaganda. The border closure is intended to prevent Western propaganda from seeping into the democratic and socialist state like a poison. The social democratic friends, on the other hand, argue that it shows little democracy to forbid people from leaving the country. Let them flee; ultimately, that benefits those who see as the pinnacle of society to live under strict control. John maintains his own position: if the

leadership of a state limits people's freedom of thought to just the freedom to adopt what leaders think, then dogma has been established, and you can hardly speak of democracy. He ironically notes that, to be consistent, the government of the GDR should actually abandon the Warsaw Pact and join the Albanian government, which rejects the reforms in the Soviet Union and its de-Stalinisation, and therefore seek alignment with the Chinese leadership. There is a brief silence, after which one of his communist interlocutors remarks that it's better not to joke about certain things. For John, this is precisely a sign that something is amiss: if you're not allowed to joke about something, then dogma has already taken control of people's minds. He notes that the Iron Curtain Queen Elisabeth spoke of more than forty years ago has now been given a new with concrete supplemented version. This primarily affects ordinary citizens today, rather than the leaders or the elite. Finally, he asks if a Corman bookstore is possible in the eastern part of Berlin where people can openly debate their differing opinions on policy options. Naturally, the Soviet faithful respond quickly: such a debate is unnecessary there, since all policy options are taken in the interest of the people… John could have foreseen it. There's no point in pointing out that in that case, no one would feel compelled to leave the area.

A few months later, he recalls that conversation, after visiting a small central heating installer. The man had applied to hire an apprentice. John is still amazed by the reasoning he heard: "I'm happy being self-employed," said the installer. "I'm my own boss, I organize myself as I please, and I don't need politicians. I advertise, and I have clients. No one should tell me how many heaters to install or that I can't install more because it's planned that way. It's a good thing the communists built the wall. For once, they're right. They'd be better off keeping people with ideas like that. Imagine if they came here telling us how to do things. No, I'm telling you: decide for yourself, work hard, and if possible, hire one or two

apprentices to tell them what to do without a peep. That's what we need; the rest is just political nonsense." How do you start a dialogue with someone who starts a conversation like that? John has to think about it, because he couldn't figure it out today. He listened to the arguments in silence and decided only to explain how a boss is expected to treat his apprentices... and then he would... Suddenly, the bend looms near the railway bridge. He was distracted, and the last thing on his mind is he is taking the bend too fast.

When he regains consciousness, he finds himself sitting in the grass next to a stranger who looks at him and says, "Ah there he is… Man, lucky you are!" John looks up and can barely recognise a car in the mangled wreckage around the concrete lamppost on the bend… lucky he is…

It's going to be a new car. Because the car wasn't even a year old yet, the insurance he received allows him to buy the same model for just under 6,000 BEF more. It's a good thing the old Ford was still worth something. Man, lucky him…

In 1962, a group of members within the Volkshogeschool, including John, became convinced that, in addition to their organisation in Oostende, there is also room for second progressive organisation, with a more political slant. Together they found the *Center for Public Education.* One of the regular guest speakers is Bob Claessens. Lectures on dialectical and historical materialism are interspersed with guided tours of museums and exhibitions, where Bob Claessens reveals himself as an eloquent art connoisseur who engages his audience with a lively, humorous tone. When discussing the relationship between capitalists and the working class, Bob likes to use simple examples. Regarding the American automobile crisis, for instance he says: "There is a crisis in the automobile industry in America. A serious crisis. What are the owners and bankers behind these factories supposed to do to keep making money? Force people

to buy cars? It's much simpler. Instead of cars, they'll build tanks and say: 'Sir, you must buy a tank, and you'll pay for it with your taxes.' Every American citizen has already paid for at least one tank. How many machine guns have you already paid for with your taxes? When you consider that more than half of our taxes are used therefore. You can't afford a sewing machine, but they're forcing you to buy a machine gun. Where does that capital go? Into the pockets of the bankers, financiers, and manufacturers of war materials."

The *Center for Public Education* also brings other speakers to Oostende. On psychiatry for instance, but there is also interest in presentations on pedagogy and psychology. The latter topic also regularly comes up for discussion in more private circles. When John hears from friends that Vygotsky's texts have been published in the United States under the title *Thinking and Speech* he asks one of his contacts, who was once billeted as a young soldier in the boarding school of the Normal School, if he could send him a copy of the book. Vygotsky's work interests him. It aligns perfectly with his ideas about the importance of social and dialogic interaction between children and with adults. This was formulated in the early 1930s, yet it has only recently become known. When he discusses the constructivist approach with some of his left-wing friends who are radical defenders of a strict hierarchy in the Communist Party, he argues that the Stalinist period was detrimental to critical thinking, including in the field of psychology. He tells his father that it would be interesting to know how Freinet would interpret Vygotsky, and also whether he would have been as enthusiastic about Soviet schools today as he was when he, as a young teacher, met with other young people and teachers during the early years of the Russian Socialist Republic.

Jeanne stops by Corman's shortly after Gaston Bachelard's death. It's the perfect opportunity to buy some of his works, as is often the

case when an author dies. She takes advantage of the opportunity to browse through philosophy and scholarly publications. Then, as she walks past the art books, she crosses a tall, sixty-year-old man who, after a nod in Kermarec's direction, leaves the shop. Jeanne asks if that's Prince Karel just leaving. She's told that the man… *Karel van Vlaanderen (of the Flanders)* is a fairly regular customer and friends with Mathieu Corman. Jeanne replies she remembers him as Prince Karel, the regent who followed the BSP-CVP government and signed the law giving women the right and duty to vote in all Belgian elections. When she tells John that evening about her encounter at Corman's, he says that Kermarec recently told him that Corman is known to many fringe runners. Authors like Jef Geeraerts and Hugo Claus frequent the place of course but he also mentions the French provocateur Boris Vian, who died three years ago and whose books are now also translated into Dutch. And Prince Karel is apparently also part of the group.
They then talk about Anne, who will soon be begin to go to kindergarten, now Paulo is starting his first year of school after summer. Jeanne hopes John won't make a fuss like he did with Paulo. When Paulo was just starting kindergarten, John could observe the playground of the neighbourhood school from the window and get Paulo as soon as he saw him crying. John promises to be a little more patient, but he's still not sure he'll be able to control himself if he sees one of his children crying when he is in the neighbourhood.

In southern Portugal, there is no kindergarten for Maria Coelho. She plays with her friends near the brook not far from the village, while her mother does the laundry with the other women or in the fields of the *latifundia*, when she goes with her mother and aunts. Her grandfather promised her to take her and her grandmother to the cattle market next year, since an uncle lives in the city there, where they can stay overnight. Daycare places for children under

six are scarce and usually only exist in the *Holy House of Mercy* of some cities. You can't really talk about preschool education in that case. Fröbel schools like the one in the Estrela district of Lisbon around the turn of the century are a mirage today. The work of Irene Lisboa and the *Seara Nova (New Harvest)* movement that organized preschool education including in the Tapada da Ajuda in the capital, was completely disbanded in 1937. On October 9 of that year, Decree 28,091 closed the official preschools, arguing that they were too expensive and had little appeal. They were replaced by the '*Obra das Mães pela Educação Nacional (Work of Mothers for National Education).'* The official view is that raising young children happens within the family and that this is the woman's most important task.
At *A Voz do Operário* it wil take until September 1963 to find a class for children aged four to six for the first time.

Louis is retiring in September. He plans to collect all the information he can find about the *New Educational Movement* and to systematise the schools that preceded it. He also wants to include what he can find about Edward Peeters and his work for the Flemish Educational Movement (*the recovered parts of this work were used for writing parts of* Loden Tijden - *note by Albert Auctor)*. His interest in Edward Peeters revived now he is convicted his mother once attended his class when Lucien was a pupil of him. Lucien had casually mentioned this during one of his visits to Oostende, when he asked why he chose Jeanne as his daughter's name. Ultimately, he wouldn't be able to begin this systematic process until the summer of 1968. First, he wanted to try to gain an overview of the evolution of compulsory school attendance.

In early 1964, Lucien is readmitted to the hospital. He is told to rest, and the heart specialist try to persuade him to do so by giving him literary notes in addition to medical prescriptions with the medication. One of those prescriptions reads:

Note.

Stil's "Foudroyage" stands alongside "Communists of Aragon" and "Un homme vient de naître". It easily reveals the free and progressive tendencies of far-left writers. Particular care is taken to detail collective situations and living conditions.

Even as avant-garde writer, Stil loses none of his freshness in his sometimes dark and revolting descriptions. I have the impression that he will be a more enjoyable to read than l'Exégète by Loisy.

Lucien says he appreciates the doctor's efforts, but he can't be blind to current events. And that gives cause for concern. In November, Kennedy was shot. Although Lucien has many questions about Kennedy's political policies, especially the ongoing siege and subsequent economic war against Cuba, which had led to significant tensions and ultimately forced the Castro government to seek somewhat reluctantly support from the Soviet Union, he believes his deputy Johnson is a troublemaker: Vietnam. Not only the *Canard Enchaîné* mocks the reasons cited by the American military leadership for launching an outright war in Vietnam. The minor damage to an American ship and an unconfirmed second attack are the reasons to give green light for a large-scale intervention. Volunteers are recruited en masse to fight for a free America against an unfree North Vietnam, which is said to threaten America and the entire world, since, like Cuba, it is supported by the Soviet Union. Lucien continues to wonder who among the world's rulers will cast the first stone. Why does the ancient biblical *an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth* is stil applied, following the example of a querulous divine figure created by tribal war mongers? And that by someone who claims to be Christian and yet rejects the Christian interpretation that Jesus' sacrificial death is a correction of the misinterpretation of Moses' law? Should a new messiah come to reprimand the worshippers of the Golden Calf? There are idealists like his son-in-law who would like just to make disappear the *Golden Calf* but Lucien thinks that there would be then a *Golden*

Lentil Field to be worshipped, whether by firstborns or not. He chuckles at the thought.

Louis and Graciete are in Oostende, and Louis is taking care of the grandchildren. He picks them up from school and walks with them every day to the rehabilitation center where Lucien was admitted after being discharged from the hospital. In the evening, after the children are in bed, he tells Jeanne and John about his findings regarding compulsory schooling, which is increasing worldwide.

"There's a kind of confusion between right and duty," Louis begins the conversation that lasts for several evenings. "That leads to contradictions about the vision of the school Dewey was talking about. Ultimately, it goes back to the very beginning of schools organized by public institutions: a school to enrich people with science and culture versus a school to enslave people by restricting their thinking into a mental straitjacket imposed by whoever held or held power."

"Why do you say that?" asks Jeanne.

"In December 1948, the Universal Declaration of the United Nations included of Human **Rights** included an article that says: '*Everyone has the right to education. Education must be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Primary education is* ***obliged****…*'."

"So it is the establishment of basic education that is an obligation imposed on the Nations, the States?" asks John.

"I would put it that way, yes," says Louis, "but it becomes a **duty** for citizens. In many States, the right to education is compulsory, and often compulsory *school attendance*. Besides, when leaders talk about the right to education, they usually only think about schooling and schools and what they should teach."

"And I guess the content is not universal," says Jeanne.

"Definitely not," Louis answers. "It is easy to see that throughout the history of the '*school for everyone*' long before that Universal Declaration."

"Where do you begin that story?" asks John.

Louis laughs. “School has existed for a long time, of course, if you consider the formation of elites all over the world, and think of philosophers and theologians in academies, universities, temples, abbeys, and all places where people study and learn. But I am limiting myself here to the phenomenon of school for children in systems that present themselves *open to everyone*. I am not talking here about the Roman schools for the plebs, but about modern systems, although *open to everyone* does not mean that all schools in that system are *accessible* to everyone.”

“Explain this,” asks Jeanne.

In Prussia, from the 1750s onward, the state under King Frederick II began to play an active role in mobilising the entire population for economic, technical, and scientific progress. This was a humanistic concept from the European period. State-authorised schools were required; work was done to develop a state-mandated common curriculum and an administrative structure to oversee the state-funded schools through inspection. At the same time, this process benefited the development of the concept of the nation state.

“In a way, the school to make the State…” says John.

“Yes. The School to create the State, but also the State to create the School, as in France, for example. The State already existed under absolute monarchs. After the revolutionary years, Napoleon took absolute power and, with his centralised government, created an educational system that placed schools centrally under the authority of a university, regionally under academies and departments, and locally under municipalities. That was new. Before, you only had a centralised royal bureaucracy with elite educational institutions in the form of *lycees* in *major schools.*

But general education for the masses did not exist. There were village and parish schools under the auspices of the Catholic Church. The establishment and integration of public primary schools for the masses occurred after the revolution.

“And all that to give all children access to all science?” asks Jeanne.

“I wouldn’t say that,” Louis answers. “Although the Prussian Frederick was inspired by the humanist idea, he remains the prince of a large German state and wants to consolidate his power. And in France the idea of *citizenship* can no longer be ignored, so the *citizens* are manufactured by the French Nation.

“Here already appears what Dewey would later call nationalistic education,” John observes.

“That’s right,” says Louis. “These early systems embodied a strategy to meet three imperatives of the emerging nation-state: the need (a) to shape citizen loyalty through the inculcation of a national ideology; (b) to provide the state with trained military personnel and administrators; and (c) to gain acceptance within society of the economic goals and industrial development of the territory under the central power’s control, even if that territory had previously been an overseas possession.”

“Can you explain this?” asks Jeanne.

“Consider South America, for example, where occupied territories gradually become independent states. Building the nation-state is a crucial task for educational systems once they have been established in the aftermath of independence. This is a virtually impossible task, given the stamp left on those areas by the Spanish and Portuguese central governments for centuries. Descendants of the occupiers mainly from those both European countries usually exclude the peoples of the conquered territories from the imported European culture and science without recognising the local culture or science. Until independence, descendants of the original population were generally excluded from the administrative language which facilitated political control over them. Colonial educational policy focused primarily on maintaining elite universities with primarily legal and theological training. Just as in North America decolonisation can be seen as a kind of false independence. In North America, English remained the lingua franca under a white British-American culture; in the newly formed

South American states, Spanish and Portuguese remain the lingua franca under a strongly Spanish or Portuguese culture. Descendants of former occupiers strive for territorial, not for cultural independence. Suddenly, education becomes a criterion for determining who is a citizen (and therefore eligible to vote) and who is not. Generally, those who cannot read or write Spanish or Portuguese do not have the right to vote. National Unity is built on the culture and language of the descendants of the former colonialists, so much of the culture and language of the indigenous population remains undervalued. Population groups such as the Quechua and Araya-speaking Indians in the Bolivian highlands, the Incas of Peru, and segments of the rural population in Mexico, Colombia, and Ecuador are still marginalised."

"A kind of internal colonization," John suggests.

"Good you saying that," Louis replies. "Hold that thought, I'll come back to it."

"Is this also the case in other European-occupied areas, such as Southeast Asia for example?" asks Jeanne.

"The situation is somewhat different. On the one hand, we know for sure that most of the countries, whether they were colonised or not —Siam, for example, was never a colony of a European power—had their own educational traditions, similar in form to those introduced in Europe since the Christian era, but much older. Buddhist monasteries had pagoda schools. Among Hindus, the padepokan served not only as a meeting place but also as a venue for—primarily religious—education. Some areas were religiously colonised by Christianity or Islam. As in other regions, including in Europe, where leaders imposed their chosen religion, young Indonesians and Malays who converted to Islam received basic literacy instruction in Koranic classes. In other settings, temple priests became the primary instructors in small village schools."

"So this corresponds quite well with the abbey schools in the Christian areas and with the local schools that appeared during the

Reformation and the subsequent Counter-Reformation," John believes.

"Something like that," Louis agrees, "That is exactly what the Christian missionaries did when they arrived in Southeast Asia with the European traders: they set up mission schools where very rudimentary education was or is provided.

Now that Indonesia, the Philippines, and recently Singapore have gained independence, those in power are also building nation-states to create a territory where regional specificities and ethnic diversity must become a single, unified national solidarity. But in some of these countries, such as Malaysia, it's not yet entirely clear what will happen."

"And in those areas or countries where open war is currently being waged, schools are not currently needed to reinforce national sentiments, the language and logic of war take care of that," Jeanne assumes.

"Perhaps," says Louis. "I know from Vietnam, currently torn apart by the power-hungry governments of the two superpowers driving the Cold War, that the people traditionally hold the promotion of learning and respect for teachers in high regard. Even before the colonial period, Indochina had a hierarchical power system with a strong feudal slant. Teachers held a position only slightly lower than that of the ruler himself. It was customary locally to invite them to live with wealthy residents, not only as preceptors for their own children, but also to teach other children in the region.

The Mandarins had been conducting highly selective examinations since the second half of the 37th century of the Chinese calendar (Hectoyear 110) at the Temple of Literature, the university where the teachings of Confucius were taught. The language was written with Chinese characters that were pronounced differently, which ultimately served to separate Chinese and Vietnamese nations. When the French invaded what was referred to as Indochina in the last century, they replaced the existing education system with a

Franco-Vietnamese system, with the aim of training people to serve the colonial economy. The French built primary schools and universities with French as the dominant language of instruction. The shortage of schools made access extremely limited, and soon 95% of the population became illiterate.

I can't say much about the rest of what was formerly French Indochina, Cambodia, and the area the French called Laos, except that they are currently under heavy American attack after the French occupation. The American authorities also see what they call the danger of Chinese or Soviet colonisation. Therefore they are attempting to colonise themselves, not only for geopolitical reasons but also for economic ones."

"So, in your view, setting up school systems generally has more to do with fostering national cohesion than with making knowledge universally accessible?" asks John.

"I'm naturally influenced by my reading of John Dewey, but yes, I see examples of that just about everywhere," Louis continues. "And mind you, I don't give it an overall negative connotation. Look at the government of Ceylon, which uses legislation regarding free and compulsory schooling to reduce child labour on coconut, coffee, and rubber plantations. There are several Arab states whose leaders want to get more girls back into school with compulsory schooling laws.

I would say that the introduction of compulsory schooling laws is generally accompanied by the desire to form nation-states, even in colonised regions where no states existed before. The meaning and purpose of the legal provisions create very different configurations depending on local political, economic, and cultural circumstances.

The educational systems in Asia and Africa are certainly struggling with the English, French, Portuguese, German, and Dutch colonial legacies, some of which still persist. Furthermore, contemporary Latin American states often face the stagnation or even the disappearance of existing education systems when the region was

colonised at the behest of the Spanish and Portuguese kings. The colonial legacy often created modern and modernising elites of European descent, but generally left behind little infrastructure, which hampers mass education. Consider, for example, the Portuguese elite education system in Brazil. After the independence of the Brazilian states from Portugal, language was never a point of discussion among the elites, and the growing mass education system often uses only that language. But Brazilian Portuguese is a form of Portuguese that only appeared in those regions after 1500."

John then notes: "Your old Portuguese friend Alfredo explained that for the Portuguese government, Mozambique is not a country or a colony, but simply an overseas province. Perhaps the colonising power wants to convince international forums that the independence fighters are wrong. At most, they would fuel an internal conflict, a bit like the Catalans or the Basques with the Spanish central government."

"Yes, and that partly explains why leaders of states that were until recently European colonies may have rightly remarked in 1961: '*If it is to fulfil its many functions satisfactorily, education in Africa must be African, that is, it must rest on a foundation of a specifically African culture and be based on the special demands of African progress in all fields.'* Unfortunately, I think this isn't about a proposal to broaden knowledge by refocusing on non-Western philosophy, but simply about replacing a specific content as in missionary schools, with another. A curriculum designed by La Salle is being replaced in several countries by a curriculum designed by religious leaders that aims to promote the same submission, obedience, subordination, and docility instead of critical thinking and creativity. It doesn't promote knowledge; it merely adjusts the hierarchy. The highest in rank can even be the same God, but the intermediate commands to whom complete obedience is owed change their names."

"But that's not the case everywhere," says Jeanne. "I believe some African leaders and intellectuals are inspired by socialist and

egalitarian ideals and link educational expansion to the education and development of the people, interweaving their own philosophy with that imported from Europe. But I can see that in other cases, progressive ideals clash with the colonial legacy, and local elites prefer to adopt the educational philosophy and exclusive school systems of European countries. This also allows these elites to have their children educated in Europe. Foreign educational languages, imported cultural values, and elite-oriented schools rooted in past colonial policies naturally perpetuate inequality, and thus create unstable situations. Many children have no access to schools, and ethnic divisions are only widening. The construction of more or less plural states has little chance. This favours those with the means to exercise legal or illegal power over large segments of the population."

"So," John summarises, "a school that frees itself from the content imposed by the former coloniser, but still retains the mental straitjacket. That's quite something."

"Or a consequence of the age-old phenomenon that all rulers like to impose their will. And then, in a sense, the previous ruler must first be erased," Jeanne thinks.

"That seems to be the case, yes," says Louis. "As far as I could observe, compulsory education and colonisation were even closely linked. A colonial policy heralded contemporary education and thus secured support for that policy. The type of schooling law clearly demonstrates the political intent, even though its implementation was sometimes difficult. Just think of the schools for slave children funded by the Dutch East India Company in areas occupied by the Seventeen Provinces in Southern Africa and Southeast Asia."

"Shall we talk more tomorrow?" Joanne says, yawning. "We have to get up early, and Daddy has to take the kids to school," she says, smiling at her father-in-law.

The next day, while drinking evening coffee, Louis says: "You

mentioned internal colonisation at some point yesterday, John, a kind of colonisation within the borders of a nation-state. Compulsory school attendance certainly serves the ruler or conqueror to achieve a favourable social contract with religious groups, local communities, parents, and children. Similar laws already existed in Prussia and Denmark 200 years ago. And before that, instructions circulated requiring parents to provide for the upbringing and education of their children. In both Europe and North America, this didn't necessarily have to take place at school; just look at Weimar or Massachusetts.

In Norway, families were urged by the church and king to teach their children the fundamental religious precepts, moral virtues, and the rudiments of reading and writing. Comenius did dream of imparting all knowledge to all people, but for the Reformation movement itself, compulsory education was more a means of increasing religious piety and individual faith among Protestant families. When those in power realised that learning at home did not lead to the desired unified thinking, mass schooling became the strategy to weaken family socialisation and home education. More community schools emerged, with standardised largely religious curricula that emphasised biblical knowledge and moral character over literacy. This was primarily the case in the 1700s in regions where a form of Protestantism was the state religion: Norway, some Swiss cantons, Dutch provinces, and German states. Later, still primarily in the industrial capitalist-driven states of nineteenth-century Europe and America it was not a right, but a duty, to undergo mass schooling, with the nation state centrally managing a network of interconnected schools. From then on, children of certain ages were legally required to attend state-approved schooling for a certain number of days and weeks each year.

"So back then school became more seen as a means of indoctrination?" asks Jeanne.

Louis thinks for a moment and then says: "Then and now, I'd say.

The indoctrination could be religious or economic, or both. There can be significant local differences, though."

"Examples, please," John says dryly.

"In some Arab countries, and also in Israel, religious education is part of the national education system. In France, religious schools that don't follow the official curriculum are private schools outside the public system. In Spain, and here too, the Roman Catholic Church is dominant and the Catholic Church enjoys preferential treatment from the government. In Spain, Franco made Roman Catholicism the state religion again, and all students (even non-Catholics) are required to follow religious instruction in school. Here in Belgium we've had the school pact in place for a good five years now. As you well know, the conflict over the existence of a state religion caused considerable delays in the development of universal, free primary and secondary education until the school pact was established. And ultimately, we now have two parallel education systems, both primarily funded by public funds. The pact's negotiators claim to be guaranteeing constitutional freedom of education.

Jeanne sharply observes: "And although Catholic education, which calls itself free education, guarantees that freedom for Catholics, public schools have to divide the curriculum-mandated morality lessons into religious and liberal morality, with students taking either one or the other. Not exactly an example of pluralistic integration."

"You could put it that way, yes," says Louis. "Further examples? Prussia made education a secular affair as early as 1810. Religious education in schools was permitted, as long as it was taught by certified teachers."

"And what about the Cold War superpowers?" John asks. "The United States and the Soviet Union?"

"Well, in the United States, faith and religion generally play a very large role in the lives of citizens. Strong personal moral and

religious orientations, along with a constant fear of state interference in religious affairs, greatly influence the differentiation of religion and education. Just think back to the many early settlers who emigrated from Europe to America to establish *God's kingdom on earth*. Everyone communicates directly with God, and there is less need for the intervention of church officials. Once again, the logic of the Reformation is present. Being able to read the Bible is essential in such a personal connection with God. The Puritan settlements, in particular, paid considerable attention to literacy and education. After American independence, the Constitution established the principle of the separation of church and state. But local communities are primarily responsible for educational facilities, and so the prevailing local religious sensitivities were clearly incorporated into many school curricula. I can say little more about the Soviet Union, which, since the revolution, has banned all religious influence from state-organized education. Officially, all schools of the Orthodox Church were also closed."

"And if I remember your explanation from yesterday, many areas colonised by Christian rulers have now either regained their former independence or emerged as independent states. Sometimes they return to earlier religious, ethical, and moral frameworks, sometimes they implement an adopted monotheistic model," Jeanne notes.

"Something like that," Louis answers. "Sometimes it's about reactions to unfulfilled expectations. Look at the still-existing Portuguese colonies so peacefully entitled as '*overseas provinces*'. Education always serves the desire to Christianise or, as is arrogantly put, to civilise the indigenous population, primarily focused on acquiring cheap labour. The education provided by missionaries is usually ineffective and rather ineffective, in stark contrast to the education provided to the children of white settlers. Initially, native parents did not seek out mission and government schools. But since the turn of the century, the increasing pressure of

the new social order has become so great that this population has sought out mission schools. This is partly because the colonists promise a greater share in 'progress' to those who can read, write, and possess basic Western knowledge.

But everywhere, not only in the territories occupied by the Portuguese government, local traditional education systems disappeared under European colonialism, supplanted by the expanding educational system of colonial governments. As far as I could tell, especially in Asia, after independence, the new authorities were confronted with two different types of religious education: mission schools and local religious schools, such as Buddhist, Hindu, Confucian, or Muslim schools. The official education system employed various strategies regarding these schools. However, the state generally did not prioritise one religion or another. In now-independent African countries, there seems to be a tendency to align the educational system being reformed more closely with the way children were socialised before the colonial invasions. I will return to this later.

In places where Islam has long been established, or where Islam succeeds Christianity, there is often some form of state religion, or an educational system closely linked to Quranic schools and madrasahs. In Quranic schools, traditionally located near mosques, teachers teach young children to read and memorise Quranic verses in Arabic, regardless of the students' native language. However, the percentage of children educated in such institutions remains relatively low, between 10 and 15% of the total school-age population."

"It's about bedtime," Jeanne says with a yawn.

"Okay," Louis replies. "Let me just finish this analysis of what I call local indoctrination. That's not just about religion, but sometimes also about maintaining a local social hierarchy."

"And not just in formerly colonised areas?" asks John.

"No," Louis answers. "Just a quick word about the now-independent

countries in Africa. There are many places where education is very diverse. Perhaps that diversity exists precisely because of rather weak institutional power. In those newly created states that took over colonial borders and encompass countless communities, children learn a wide variety of local languages. That's just one aspect of the local experiences children bring with them once they enter a public school system. That diversity is much smaller in North Africa and the Nile Valley, where local languages have long been supplanted by Arabic as an imposed cultural language."

"Just as is the case with Spanish, Portuguese, French or English in areas colonised by the Western European world," says Jeanne.

"Exactly," Louis agrees. "But worldwide, you see how great the role of money and power play. Look at the nation states where there's sufficient funding to extend compulsory schooling to 10 or more school years. The Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, and France are among them. Other nation states only provide 4 or 5 compulsory school years. This is usually because there are few resources available for more free schooling, as in some recently independent countries. But it can also be because the central government doesn't want the compulsory education period to be too long, so as not to over-school children as is still the case in Portugal today.

The renewal of a school system can also be primarily related to the desire to maintain a clear hierarchy, only with other key players. Japan saw this as the educational reforms following the abolition of feudalism and the Meiji Revolution of 1868. This reform was absolutely necessary for the reorganisation of national institutions and the establishment of a central bureaucracy. While the Meiji leaders used education as a means to increase national solidarity, they primarily wanted to school a vocationally and technically competent population, including a small, forward-looking elite. This desire influenced the types of schools in the cities, which differed from those in the villages.

Where the creation of a new hierarchy is perhaps most evident is in

the education system of the contemporary Soviet Union. As you know, the establishment and expansion of a national education system stemmed from the Bolshevik Revolution. Its basic principles were established in 1918. The Soviet authorities established educational institutions en masse, with the aim of literacy but also to reinforce meritocratic principles. I understand that Soviet education follows highly rational, hierarchical, and bureaucratic lines of authority, structurally built in from the central ministry through various regional and district levels to school principals, classroom teachers, and students.

In the United States, one can speak, in a sense, of a hierarchy of moral authority. The individual states, not the federal government, have sovereign power over education. No national system developed, although at the formation of the United States, federal regulations required territories to provide schooling as a condition of joining the Union. Between 1830 and 1870, systems based on publicly funded public schools administered by boards of education developed in the northern states. Repeated moral "crusades" resulted in many children and young people being enrolled in schools with clear religious and ideological contours, built by the community and funded by the government. For a long time, there was even a higher enrolment rate of young children in predominantly rural and agricultural states than in the more urban and industrial states."

"It's a bit like our school pact," says John. "Is that your overview for today?"

"A quick word about Great Britain," Louis concludes. "There, the more conservative English elite has long feared that educating the common people would contribute to political discontent and revolutionary outbreaks, as happened in France. That's why they preferred to establish elite schools, misleadingly called 'public', even today. These schools aim to educate well-informed and refined gentlemen, and now also gentle ladies.

Other segments of the elite sought to broaden the concept of citizenship, encompassing political suffrage. Central to them was the education of the masses. A series of legal provisions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries increased the educational responsibilities of both the central state and local governments. This led to the creation of educational institutions, a kind of community or state school, serving the children of ordinary English citizens and effectively complementing the 'public' institutions that still primarily serve the children of political and economic elites. And there's more tomorrow.
Sleep tight, both of you."

Two days later, Louis, Jeanne, and John resume their conversation when the latter says: "Can it be said that the richer states of Europe and America are pursuing a policy based on the proposition '*mass education for mass mediocrity*' so that all those destined to rule continue to hold a dominant position, and those destined to be controlled receive what they need to be useful as workers? Perhaps. And since you mentioned Japan, I read yesterday that the postwar imposed curricula owe a great deal to comparisons with an industrial world power like the United States or a military competitor like China. Models for hierarchy and coercive power, in a sense."
"Yes, there's such a general trend, not only in wealthy countries, but also wherever there are leaders with dictatorial tendencies, whether those countries are rich or poor," says Louis. "Maintaining power goes hand in hand with having a workforce that isn't overly critically trained, benefiting economic interests, whether these are purely liberal capitalist or subject to a centrally determined planned economy. Political changes often entail a revision of compulsory education. Today in Thailand, Iraq, the Philippines, Indonesia; yesterday in Korea, Prussia, Austria, and the United States. In recent decades, government leaders in South and Central American states

that were formerly Spanish and Portuguese colonies have been working on free, compulsory schools along similar lines. Compulsory attendance is enshrined in law in 48 of the 60 independent states and benefits the needs of large corporations financed primarily by North American and European capital."

"Economy, economy, economy?" John asks again.

"Not only, but… well… The recent war and the subsequent ones created a different view of women's work when laws on compulsory school attendance were passed. Not only do the medical and psychological sciences, somewhat on the margins, paint a new picture of the childhood of boys and girls. Educators such as Fröbel, Decroly, and the *LIEN* members also did so. But cynically, it is the need for women in the labour market and the desire to subject the social education of young children to national guidelines that embody certain moral values that leads to more funding for the training of certified teachers. More teachers means that the age at which children are considered to be of compulsory schooling can be lowered. Compulsory schooling involves increasingly younger children. The end age varies more than the start age, as it is more influenced by national laws regarding child labour or youth labour, such as apprenticeships.

Currently, some elites cling to a society with clearly defined social classes. This entails budgetary measures that quickly impact secondary education. The three six-year general education programs followed by at least four years of vocational training for everyone was a dream for Comenius; today, it seems like a utopia. *Massively* stands for *mediocrely*, to use your words."

"Mediocrity for all, and excellence for a few, in private schools, is that the educational model we have today?" asks Jeanne.

"With some nuances, yes," Louis answers. "In many nation states, whoever holds power also wants to control private schools. This usually happens by imposing curricula in exchange for subsidies and monitoring their implementation. That's nothing new. I'll

summarise what I learned: In Prussia, the number of public primary schools was already greater than the number of private schools in 1861. In France, the Jules Ferry law of 1881 made primary education free of costs. This gave the government the pretext to financially support private schools, coupled with a strategy to keep them under control.

Until 1833, schools in Great Britain were primarily voluntary. There were dame and charity schools for basic education, owned by private individuals who managed their own initiatives. These also included "public" schools, founded, financed, and managed thanks to individual legacies. The colleges were determined to assert their independence from state intervention or control. Private sponsors still finance and manage the centuries-old elite system of "*public schools"*. Today, many nation-states allow private schools in a decentralised education system, parallel to the public school network. The United States is perhaps where you'll find the most prominent proponents of this modality. I've already mentioned Latin America. The long history of class and institutional hierarchies, often reinforced during colonisation, not only created the labels *colegio* and *escuela* to distinguish between the private and public sectors, but especially to express major social inequalities. Even in today's Portugal, there is a big difference between being a student of a *colégio* or a *escola*. In our country, the more traditional Catholic education system likes to use the trump card of being an elite school.

The more a state government favours a centralised education system, the more it discourages private education. This is clearly evident in France, the Soviet Union, China, and Japan. In the socialist countries, now also known as Eastern Bloc countries, I know that governments see schooling as a crucial investment in achieving collective, state-defined goals. The state fully funds education and draws up detailed plans for who will do what once they reach adulthood."

“This all seems so negative,” sighs Jeanne. “The school of enslaving or mothering large segments of the population instead of liberating them. The elite can do as they please, as long as they don’t completely deviate from what the nation stands for, according to those in power.”

Louis continues: “We’ve experienced it ourselves in recent history but it’s not really a new phenomenon. The elite that uses words to distance themselves from their peers doesn’t like democracy. That’s why there’s such a long history of non-universal education, which focuses solely on the consolidation and reproduction of elites by targeting children from privileged or propertied classes. This elitist principle was preserved in the colonies where strong government in the hands of kings, emperors, or religious leaders already existed. When colonising peoples with less hierarchical organisational structures, the occupying elite quickly created a local political, religious, or economic elite, offering a classical academic education with a rigorous curriculum at selective institutions. The British Commonwealth used the tradition of boarding schools for this purpose, often far from home.

The first “democratic” opening was based on meritocracy, as had long existed in some Eastern empires. In Europe, the principle emerged relatively late. In my view, it was the industrialists and the new elite, rather than the aristocracy and old elites, who introduced the idea that national progress depends on the extent to which a society provides educational services that enable its most outstanding citizens to develop their talents and abilities, regardless of their social background.

After the 1940-45 war, the transformation of secondary education clearly began in our country, which is perhaps a positive note, Jeanne. Let us say that in many places in Europe, the rise of the socialist and social democratic parties is contributing to the creation of more educational opportunities, which may perhaps mitigate social inequality. But schools alone cannot address mediocrity, even

if they are given considerable credit in some circumstances. As early as 1871, the Ecuadorian government declared that the compulsory education law was a means of combating parental lack of interest in education and, moreover, of overcoming colonial prejudices against girls' education. Mind you, colonial prejudices, perhaps from Catholic rulers."

John notes: "If I remember correctly, the American soldiers who stayed at the Normal School at the end of the war talked about secondary education and vocational training there. But if I hear you now, they didn't quite get the message of Comenius in the United States, did they?"

"Things seemed to be moving in the that direction if you look at the development of schools and education from the perspective of the dissemination of knowledge. Since the 1920s, secondary schools have flourished in America. Care was taken to ensure post-primary education combining general academic training with a wide range of options to accommodate the growing student population. This was done, however, with a pragmatic undertone inspired by psychologists like Thorndike and Dewey. A multifaceted approach, therefore, to ensure that schools educate students according to their intelligence and talent to serve society. So far so good. General education, adjustments based on the diversity of the student body, encouraging talent. With a big BUT: *hierarchy*. All good humanistic intentions run up against a hierarchy based on money, meritocracy, and power. This isn't only visible in selective top-tier universities. Universities and schools are subject to a hierarchy; there are shorter academic programs or programs that take place in the workplace, offering options to students from families without an academic background and with fewer financial resources. It's almost paradoxical. The republican and relatively recent history of immigrants who took over vast areas of North America, largely by force of arms, naturally entails a much weaker elitist tradition than the etiquette- and ritual-filled history of *Homelands* like Great

Britain, Prussia, Saxony, Russia—in short, old Europe in the hands of kings, tsars, and emperors. But still. Those from academically trained families are sent to longer courses and to what are considered more prestigious vocational training programs: judges, lawyers, doctors, surgeons. From families with less academic backgrounds, here and there someone can advance to prestigious universities, mainly by sports. Proposing a pragmatic secondary education that quickly leads to career choices for those descended from slaves is, in my opinion, a kind of deception from the new elite, who rely not on aristocratic descent, but on property and money, through which they simply buy power. You have to have a lot of money to run for political office or to be 'democratically' elected."

Jeanne sighs. "It seems like an impossible task to create a community through education that simply appreciates diversity and doesn't attach elitist or hierarchical value judgments to it. It seems as if as soon as two people do something different, it comes down to establishing a ranking and assigning a better-worse rating. And of course, there's good money and bad money, good power and bad power. What one person describes as an ingenious business venture turns out to be nothing more than a gangster's trick by others."

Louis nods and then says: "But that shouldn't discourage us. Working on the margins isn't always easy, sometimes dangerous, but it is absolutely necessary. I never knew much about my great-grandparents' lives, but their decision to live in Moresnet was certainly related to a desire to live more on the margins and also to work on the margins of education. Since the school systems of nation-states have existed, many have worked outside the official system, few on the margins of the system itself. And those who choose to do so often struggle or are sidelined. Think of Célestin Freinet."

When Lucien is released from the rehabilitation center, Louis and

Graciete return to Ghent. Shortly after their stay in Oostende, Louis has to interrupt his research to care for Graciete. Her depression gradually spreads to longer periods, leaving her completely incapable of doing anything for days. Preparations for Hans' wedding plunge Graciete into melancholy. Louis is responsible for the entire household. The large rental house has two floors with a total of four bedrooms, one of which has been converted into a bathroom, in addition to the ground floor with a double living room, kitchen, and utility room with a garden. Maintaining all of this, along with grocery shopping and preparing meals, leaves little time for reading and writing. Jeanne and John occasionally miss their conversations with him.

In 1965, Ernesto Guevarra, Cuba's Minister of Industry, returns home after a tour that included a visit to Congo. Shortly thereafter, he resigns as minister. He returns to Congo, this time as a guerrilla fighter, to support Laurent-Désiré Kabila in his armed opposition to General Mobutu, who had Prime Minister Lumumba assassinated in a coup four years earlier. During the summer holidays, almost eight-year-old Paulo sometimes overhears his father and grandfather talking about Congo and how, in their view, everything went wrong. Lucien speaks of apparent independence. They also discuss Cuba where the government apparently offers sufficient resistance to American investors who want to regain a firmer grip on the island. He fantasises about dividing the world into good and bad. When he mentions this to his "pépé" as he addresses Lucien, Lucien tels him it can be dangerous to divide the world into good and bad. In every country there are people making mistakes, who do stupid thing and sometimes bad things, and in every country there are people who invent things, who write books, who enjoy interacting with people from other countries. When Paulo starts his third year at the brand-new city elementary school in the neighbourhood, Lucien tells him he's lucky he can learn about

things because it will teach him to think more clearly.
Shortly after the start of the school year, John and Jeanne receive a letter from the Secretary General of the *National League for School Civility*.

Sir and Madam,
If you are concerned about the problems relating to the education of young people, if you want your children to become human beings worthy of the name, we are convinced that the attached pink leaflet, published by the Ministry of National Education and Culture on the occasion of the 2nd National Week of School Courtesy, will be of great interest to you, as will the course program that the League would be delighted to see developed in all schools in the country.
But to achieve this noble goal we need your help. That is why we are sending you an urgent appeal to become a member of our league.
We welcome all your suggestions. Bring any concerns you may have. Report any acts of courtesy you may have witnessed from students. And... together, we will strive to build a better world.
Hoping that thanks to your good support, we will be able to lead the League towards ever-increasing success, we present to you with our advance thanks, the expression of our very distinguished feelings.

The answer will follow a few months later.

Madame,
My wife and I would like to thank you for requesting our collaboration with the initiatives of the National League for School Courtesy.
It is obvious that the problems relating to the education of young people cannot leave us indifferent in our dual capacity as parents and educators.
This is why we find ourselves somewhat embarrassed to express our skepticism about the results of your action. But are not sincerity and frankness the basis of all true courtesy?
We are convinced that your efforts are not intended to restore the image of a more or less outdated code, but that on the contrary they aim to instil in young people the profound meaning of courtesy as

defined in your program: the testimony of generosity of heart and spirit.

We share the League's concern and we deplore with it the often brutal or barely disguised selfishness characterising human relationships, particularly when it comes to young people.

However, it seems to us that the roots of this evil are very deep and that they originate in the human condition engendered by the structure of the society in which we live.

Doesn't this society seem like a jungle where only cunning and strength allow one to survive?

Doesn't today's adolescent find himself confronted with living conditions that are in flagrant contradiction with the great principles and moral precepts instilled in him by his educators?

Do not the major media such as the press, cinema, and certain literature offer him a false happiness to which there is only one obstacle: the others?

So, as he does not want to be fooled, by a sort of defensive reflex, he shows himself arrogant, without scruples, in order to be able to conquer - at all costs - his place in this society.

Thus the efforts made by the League seem to us doomed to failure, because they must necessarily limit themselves to dealing with a surface phenomenon, a witness phenomenon, and because they are powerless to combat the causes of the evil.

A pessimistic and little constructive attitude, you might say? No, not at all. The hope for a better world, for a more humane society, has never seemed more sensible than today to those who are attentive to a new phenomenon: the dialogue, still timid, between the great progressive forces.

We believe that this dialogue between people of "good will", believers and non-believers but all concerned with greater social justice, all aware of the global scale of economic and political problems and the urgency of finding appropriate solutions, we believe that this dialogue is part of an irreversible evolution and we collaborate in it to the extent of our means.

When finally Man is no longer the enemy of Man, but a necessary complement, the very condition of its individual development, courtesy

will have become an essential quality of human relations.
Please excuse our frankness, which in no way excludes our esteem for your work, and please accept, Madam, the expression of our consideration.

At the end of the year, Jeanne and John celebrate their tenth wedding anniversary with a large family reunion featuring a lavish meal. Pépé's menu reads: *Asparagus cream*, *Beef tongue with mushrooms, apple croquettes* with the *flacon de Provence*; the *Normandy hole*; *Leg of mutton in venison with chestnut mousse* with *Chateau grand barrai Saint Emilion '62*; the *cheese platter*, Chateau Margot Pomerol '62; the *iced log*, the *fruit basket*, the *Moka*, the *after-coffee.*

The day after Christmas, Louis and John have coffee together. Louis talks about the latest methodological discussions related to learning to read and write: "It's almost as if Célestin Freinet and his '*grip on life'* in which he helps children print their own texts, has been an involuntary precursor to the approach to the subject of discussion. In short: for over two hundred years, almost the entire enlightened pedagogical world has criticised the endless training to recognise letters and only then combine them into words. Spelling reading has been in use in Europe since the time when learning to read Latin preceded reading one's own language, if it was already fixed in written form. With the development of school systems, purely synthetic spelling reading is increasingly coming under attack, and the *normal word methods* are also presented as *analytical-synthetic* methods. Because many believe that too much emphasis is still placed on isolating letters in the *global word methods.* Children would rather analyse whole sentences and word images themselves, and then proceed to synthesis to create and write new words. Many spelling difficulties result from this. Therefore, others besides Freinet have as he proposes focused on simultaneously analysing and synthesising words, by building more structure into the analysis, making synthesising easier. According to some, it's best to

continue working with a standardised set of words; according to others, you can just as easily use your own sentences and words as a starting point together with the children, as long as you continually work from analysis to synthesis and from synthesis to analysis. Nowadays, this is called the *structural method*. Perhaps that's also something for working with adults, or with young people who have always had a lot of difficulty mastering reading and writing? Think about it."

A few months later, John sits with his friends from Oostende, chatting after a presentation they organized on the significance of the Second Vatican Council, recently concluded by Pope Paul VI. The guest speaker was François Houtart, who, at the request of Helder Camara, had compiled a document a few years earlier based on studies of Catholicism in the social and cultural context of Latin America. He is also no stranger to the peace movement, having publicly opposed the war that successive US administrations continue to wage in Vietnam. One of John's friends, a sociologist and devout Catholic, has great admiration for the sociologist of religion. During the conversation, the names of Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman are mentioned. John is very enthusiastic about their recently published book *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* he bought at Corman's.

"What strikes me about their argument," says John, "is that they posit that as soon as a community or society becomes institutionalized, it acquires a kind of objective truth. But that objective truth is ultimately nothing more than cultural patterns established by previous generations in a particular context with a particular language."

"That is in a nutshell the core of the proposition of the two authors you mentioned," replies his sociologist friend. "Once institutionalised, new generations are asked to accept that truth as the only reality and to be absorbed by it."

John then looks at his friend: “But how can we accept as true what was institutionalised by previous generations? Isn’t this precisely the root cause of many conflicts? I mean, if you institutionalise a God and then tell he only cares for the chosen people, the construction of that social reality is a death trap for all subsequent generations.”

His friend laughs. “In the second part of the Book which I think you’re referring to attention is paid to that hypostasis of the universal God, who was guided by his love for humanity and not by feelings of vengeance for those who don’t follow him. Perhaps other dogmas that aim for love of humanity also need such a second part.”

That makes John laugh again: “Maybe an idea to export to Eastern Europe? But what I actually wanted to say is that it seems rather unrealistic to me to say that the next generations only have to make sure they fit into the institutionalised. It is like saying ‘*everything is taken care of, just follow along*’. It sounds not only arrogant but also very paternalistic. Besides, things didn’t end well for that hypostasis trying to tinker the existing God. And almost two thousand years later, many who claim to follow in the footsteps of the triune God still work more with vengeance and damnation than with love and forgiveness… But I find the work of Berger and Luckmann especially interesting because of the connection they make between objective—institutionalised—reality and subjective reality. What language do you use to describe subjective reality? What language is used to describe objective reality? And I’m not talking about Latin, Greek, Arabic, Chinese, or West Flemish. I was thinking of the words used to elaborate on the concepts that make reality what it is. How does a child have access to it? What access does a child get from a factory worker, a day labourer, an aristocrat, a factory director, a professor? Is there an interaction between objective and subjective reality? Or is there a subordination of subjective reality to objective reality? When is it so, and when is it not? What is the

relationship between the assumed objective reality and the actualisation of the child? How does it differ from child to child, and what are the factors involved? Do you understand what I'm struggling with?"

The guest speaker then says that many struggle with this and that, in his opinion, Luckmann and Berger limit themselves to establishing that any community's knowledge and the development of the reality adopted by that community are interrelated. He then turns to John, suggesting to read more of what liberation theologians are writing. He also announces the forthcoming book in Portuguese *Educação como prática da liberdade (Education as a practice of freedom)* from Paulo Freire.

The group of friends who regularly meet, often join by others after a discussion evening or some activity organized by their own club or association are increasingly toying with the same idea: how to bring together more people in Oostende who take initiatives in their own associations but who can also interest others. Is a kind of platform, a shared calendar, possible, where everyone can stay informed about what everyone else is organising? Couldn't people participate in activities organized by others without further ado, not with the intention of being convinced or working towards some kind of unified idea, but simply by knowing what others are doing, not by hearsay, but by being present? John is incredibly enthusiastic when the platform takes shape in 1967 under the name Cultural Council, and as a convinced pluralist, he fully contributed to it.

From his father he hears about the latest developments in the *Kinderdorf Pestalozzi.* Will it become a regular reception center instead of a long-term educational project? He doesn't know. What preoccupies him is the news that the British Royal Family has funded a house of worship open to all religions. What does that mean? An attempt at broader interfaith dialogue, the marketing of an old aristocracy or a humanist project? Moreover, the children's

village is now also open for short stays, during extended holidays, for recreational purposes. How does that fit in with the initial attempts to create a learning space for humanist fraternity, as he initially believed he understood in connection with this children's village? Perhaps he had it all wrong.

Paulo is now ten years old and, of course, doesn't really know what's going on in the minds of the adults closest to him. He does, however, chat non-stop with his pépé about the Great Figures of Dutch History he learns about at school. Naturally, most of them were fearless warriors who resisted the invading troops, from Huns to Romans, from the Prussians to the French from the Dutch to the Germans. It's almost always about invading peoples by more or less violent kings, princes, warriors, or leaders who incite others to kill, steal, rape, and occupy. Lucien tells Paulo a bit about the trenches and the often completely distraught young soldiers, about the attempts at fraternisation during the Christmas holidays, and about how, in the end, no one really knew why they were in those trenches on either side of a mud-strewn strip. He also briefly talks about the second war in which he was involved as a reserve officer, during which he reads out a list that he has been keeping in his little notebook for some time: *One aircraft carrier corresponds to 122,000 schools, one torpedo factory equals 20 hospitals each with 120 beds, one missile base equals 1 dam producing 1753 million kW a year, one US bomber plane is 290,000 teacher salaries, or 30 universities with 1,000 students, or 500,000 tractors, or 1,500,000 harvesters salaries.* When Paulo later, as an adult, hears reports about the production of new war material, he thinks back to that list. Lucien concludes his story once again thinking about what is good and what is bad, this time in relation to the use of weapons. Paulo is surprised when his grandfather explains to him that a soldier who kills other soldiers is not considered a murderer, but that if the same person is no longer a soldier and kills someone else, he can be considered a murderer.

He further explains that fighters in a state's army are soldiers, but those who fight under the command of someone who is not the head of state can be considered mercenaries or simply killers. Paulo finds it odd that the fighters of such an army are initially considered murderers, but the next day, if their leader declares himself head of state, can suddenly be soldiers of a state. Lucien says with a sad smile that it's not all that simple when people are confronted with each other and have weapons at their disposal. He thinks of Ernesto Guevarra from whom it is now certain he was killed in Bolivia. Can you say that it's right to take up arms to defend others against those who invade their territory with the intention of seizing possessions and power by force of arms? From what perspective do you evaluate such a situation? In the Lumumba case, a few years ago, it was abundantly clear that even within the United Nations, there were two camps, each reasoning from its own ideological perspective. For one camp, General Mobutu's coup was inevitable to maintain good relations between the Congolese state and the companies investing there, while for the other, it was an act of aggression against the wishes of the population. His grandson's good and bad become pawns in a game of wills and ends between bickering individuals who see themselves as diplomats, but work not towards consensus but towards confrontation.

Paulo isn't even eleven when he loses his pépé. His third heart attack in ten years proved fatal. Paulo doesn't understand why his grandfather, lying in bed with his eyes closed, no mare suddenly looks at him to asks to fetch the newspaper or a pack of cigarettes on the street corner. He sits quietly beside the bed. Meanwhile, Jeanne collects a few objects, including the latest *Canard Enchaîné* he bought but did not have the opportunity to open. It contains articles about American involvement in Vietnam and the impending peace negotiations. There's a cynical article about the French war industry. There are also short articles and cartoons about student

protests against the French establishment, which led by the French president react angrily. *Les bourgeois, c'est comme les cochons*, Brel would sing, John thinks. Will those students make the same reproach in a few decades, as in Brel's song?

The growing social tension in France, which explodes in May, passes somewhat by the Demeester-Souris. On the one hand, Jeanne and Charlotte are in the midst of mourning after Lucien's death, and on the other, Louis and Graciete return to Oostende because Graciete's condition is deteriorating and Louis is struggling to care for her alone. Shortly afterward, she passes away, and Louis stays with John and his family for another two months. He visits Charlotte every day. The topic of conversation, of course, is their lives with Lucien and Graciete, respectively.

After his mother's death, John slowly begins to pay attention to events in Europe again. In Paris, students and some professors remain active in various protest movements. John is drawn to the slogan "*forbidden to forbid"*. This inspires him to propose starting a *tertúlia* with a small group of Ostend intellectuals with diverse beliefs. The group will continue as long as two of its members will be alive. In this group, John debates faith and science, the exercise of power and democracy—the school that advertises itself as democratic but is not. He quotes a comment by the Spanish-French psychiatrist Tosquelles, which he happens to come across: '*By forcing children to work mechanically, without cultivating the higher functions of synthesis and decision, by neglecting the links between affectivity and action, traditional schools daily practice veritable pedagogical lobotomies'.* Two years later he would make the link with institutional psychotherapy.

In that early period of the discussion and thinking group, John returns to Jeanne's *paradox of pluralism.* Can the idea of a dissenter be banned in the name of the right to free thought? Can the right to free thought be given over to those who, in the name of this same freedom of thought, use it to physically attack or even murder

adherents of certain schools of thought? According to John, fundamental adherence to dogma leads to a narrowing of the concepts of pluralism and cosmopolitanism. He repeatedly tells his conversationalists that he considers himself an agnostic when it comes to God. He cites the statement attributed to Gandhi: '*God has no religion*' and counters that religion may not have a God but that proving God itself is perhaps irrelevant and as far as he's concerned perhaps impossible. "The only knowledge I have, is not having the knowledge for this," he says with a pun.

That same year, John returns to the topic of free thought versus dogma. He discusses persecution, which can be religious or non-religious. According to him, dogma easily leads to persecution and even murder, and not only among members of the same religious community. He's not just referring to a religious institution that arrogates the right to persecute or sentence to death by inquisition or fatwa anyone who deviates. He also addresses imprisonment for "re-education" in inhumane conditions, often resulting in death, ordered by leaders such as Enver Hoxha, Joseph Stalin, and Walter Ulbricht. Dogmatic thinking apparently quickly turns morality and ethics into a straitjacket, a straitjacket, instead of a guideline for peaceful coexistence. He brings up John Dewey, the anti-militarist who died in 1952 and who both led the investigation into the lies used by the USSR leaders about Trotsky and denounced the obstacles used by the United States government against Russell.

During the discussion he thus allows to arise, one of the topics discussed is the occupation of Prague by Warsaw Pact troops. John takes the opportunity to explain to one of his friends, who is part of the director board of the local Communist Party branch, why, after reading the 2,000-word manifesto and the subsequent invasion, he will never be persuaded to join the Communist Party. According to him the idea of the *dictatorship of the proletariat* is not only a terribly unfortunate term, but also incompatible with a pluralistic upbringing and a cosmopolitan ethic. Moreover, he adds, in

practice, you see that such a dictatorship ultimately doesn't exist, but is in the hands of a party apparatus that keeps the proletariat as far from the decisions as any particracy in what's called the capitalist West. One of the other friends jokingly remarks that John urges to better his argument now that the leader of Albania is leaving the Warsaw Pact in protest at the invasion of Prague. He could still be considered a Maoist and a supporter of Hoxha…

The conversation then turns to the reporting on the Vietnam conflict, which has escalated into what many consider a hopeless war. John says he often feels uncomfortable when he hears the frivolous, downplaying, or underestimating commentary on buses and trains. He is also bothered by how the genocide, which he compares to the murder of Native Americans during the colonisation of the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, and even after the colonists declared their independence from Great Britain, is portrayed. "You've even linked it to the superficiality with which many celebrate Christmas," says one of his Christian friends. "I read your little chronicle in the regional weekly *Tijdingen*".

"Which chronicle?" asks someone else.

John's friend picks up the copy of the weekly magazine and reads:

Another trench crib.

As the others, I also don't know who is "the phenomenon" that moved the nativity scene into the middle of a war scene —perhaps simply someone with opposing superficiality. Perhaps someone who can't connect the viscous fuss surrounding the Christmas event with sentimental chanting and "emotional" music in our streets, with the deep symbolism of this holiday.

A group of Dutch young people called it a consumption festival, and they protested it by going on a hunger strike. Their stance seems more evangelical to me than the "disapproving comments" of the locals and some visitors.

Why the rejection?

Christmas is a celebration of light, for Christians of joy. And that the previously sober, traditional meal of the homecoming churchgoers,

after midnight mass, gradually turned into a feast—oh come on, the lack of inner peace is already so hard to compensate for.
But shouldn't even the misery of the war in Vietnam or elsewhere be considered here, or is any allusion to it out of place? Where will the Christ Child be born today? Perhaps in a hut in a Vietnamese village, under the threat of napalm, or among the Caboclos in the Brazilian jungle, or in the dark shantytowns on the outskirts of the many "light cities". In any case, among the humble, the poor, and the oppressed of our time.
"Peace to all of good will." All the more so for the partygoers who were briefly—just briefly—shocked by the "trench crib".

His friend then says: "You're a sweet, good mannered writer, John. You show your annoyance, but you remain friendly to those you want to pull their ears. And because you talked about colonising... did you follow Corman's latest row with the Bruges prosecutor's office? You know the bookstore made a big display case for the launch of *Black Venus* by Jef Geeraerts. Corman was once again accused of all sorts of things, from pornography to defamation of the government and the royal family, as if he were the one who wrote that book. And I recommend it to you. Not at all sweet, like our John here, but a very raw description of the life of a Belgian civil servant in Congo, where at times you can only feel uneasy. "Maybe you'll manage to get a book between two confiscations," he concludes with a grin. The following year, the circle of friends briefly revisit the book when it wins the State Prize for Literature, which causes considerable criticism among the segment of the population that considers itself conservative.

For the next seven years, Paulo keeps a kind of vacation diary, filled with anecdotes about July in the south of France, in a rented house nestled in the vineyards, on a bend in a river. In 1969, he is twelve and describes the night of July 20th, when the entire family listens to the radio report of the first moon landing. He notes radio commentaries and remarks how inappropriate he find the reports.

People call it an American feat of strength, while all the scientists and researchers involved in the entire project knew that the realisation of this feat was the result of a very long period of discoveries, hypotheses, inventions, attempts, failures, and successful trials and experiments that, as his father says, began in antiquity, with national academies and international conferences playing a significant role since the seventeenth century. During the last European war, German engineers succeeded in developing the technology to launch rockets, the basis for all launch vehicles that have been able to put objects and subsequently living beings into space since 1957, with human knowledge of mathematics and physics contributing to the safe return to Earth of those living beings in most cases. He mentions the Russian cosmonaut Gagarin, who also tells what he read about the *father of space flight* Tsiolkovsky, who drew his inspiration from Jules Verne (note Alberto Auctor*: see Enlightened Citizens Schools*). He mentions the sentence the astronaut utters around four in the morning European time when he finally sets foot on the moon: "*one small step for man, one giant step for mankind*" and writes that he appreciates it. He also mentions a comment from his father: "Unfortunately, many opinion makers, along with government leaders, just as they do with many other human achievements, turn it into a kind of misplaced competition between rival nations, even when only a very few in each of those nations are capable of such achievements. These astonishing achievements are rarely, if ever, the result of scientific work strictly within the artificial boundaries of artificial states."

Early that same year, John contacted Hendrik Keuleer on behalf of the *Center for Public Education* to invite him for a discussion evening about Cuba. He immediately receives the following response:

To Comrade Demeester,

Very dear brother without apron,

I thank you for your letter and hasten to reply that I would be happy

to come. That day is a holiday, which is particularly convenient.
As a title, I propose a choice between "That Heretic Cuba of the PURS" or "Bank of Commerce and the Holy Spirit." (PURS: Partido Unido de la Revolución Socialista, formerly known as PCC; the Banco do Comércio e do Espírito Santo actually exists and is one of the most important in Portugal. This, of course, refers to the former Cuba, the chosen private and luxurious brothel of the USA, including all sorts of exclusive refinements.)
Elsewhere, I've called my piece "Happy Neurosis Island", if you prefer, that's fine too. You'll also receive some stencils separately, including ones about Cuba.
With the poor of the Earth
HK 28 I 1969

John and Jeanne appreciate the style of the reply and are eager to get to know the man better. They invite him to join them for dinner before leaving for the interview room. This proves agreeable, and they correspond for the rest of the year. In November, Hendrik and his partner come to stay with John and Jeanne for a weekend. Hendrik announces in a letter:

13 11 69
Dear friends,
We'll arrive tomorrow at an unspecified time because we're going to try to hitchhike. We have to be careful as Oostende is a long way from Ghent (for the Rail way Company, which apparently confuses the Transmenapian with the Trans-Siberian). We'll call when we get there, but please don't do anything special: the view of the sea will be a real treat (we've never seen it from so high).

There's nothing special, but over a good bottle of wine and a cheese board, the conversation quickly turns lively, including topics like public education and the allergic reactions of those in power to a nation overly knowledgeable. "Bread and circuses" Paulo says, somewhat knowingly, "to maintain class divisions". Hendrik looks at him: "Right, young man, something went wrong with history lessons at school, which should have focused on heroic stories, to

prompt this social analysis." As a Romance Languages specialist, Hendrik is quite well-informed about what's happening in South America and Portugal. Suddenly, he recite the lyrics of a Juca Chaves song:

Política confusa, ninguém chega a conclusão,
um lado diz que sim, e o outro diz que não.
Feijão aumenta o preço,
cofap tem razão,
governo diz que sim,
o povo diz que não.
Se continuar assim haverá revolução,
o povo diz que sim
governo diz que não.
O parlamentarismo, é útil pra nação,
governo diz que sim,
o povo diz que não.
Sairá vitorioso Francisco Julião,
o povo diz que sim,
Lacerda diz que não.
Aqui não há problemas, pra que tanta confusão?
o povo passa fome, mas Brasil é campeão!

John immediately asks Hendrik to recite the poem again while he records it. This happens, followed by a spontaneous translation:

(Confusing politics without conclusions,
one side says yes, the other says no.
Beans are rising in price,
Cofap has to do so,
the government says yes,
the people say no.
A revolution is upcoming oh!,
the people say yes,
the government says no,
Parliamentarism is useful for the nation,
the government says yes,

the people say no.
The winner will be Francisco Julião,
the people say yes,
Lacerda says não.
No problems here, why sow confusion?
The people are hungry, but Brazil is champion!)

The adults return to the table, facing the sea through double-glazed windows. It's a grey day, with intermittent rain, and the swirling sand streaks the beach between the high-tide line and the waterline.

Suddenly, Hendrik says: "do you have a beach towel? I want to go for sea bath." John advises him to be careful and suggests joining him on the beach. But Hendrik declines the offer. He descends to the Zeedijk, and shortly after, the others see from the window a small figure in swimming trunks walking onto the beach. Arriving at the water's edge, he secures the beach towel with a pile of sand and resolutely walks into the water. A moment later, he emerges and wraps himself in the towel. He returns to the apartment, shivering violently. Even after rubbing himself dry, he's still shivering so badly that John has to help him drink a large glass of Calvados, bit by bit, as he's unable to hold anything in his hands.

A week later, John sends Hendrik a typed note, saying that their weekend visit had been a kind of oasis in the desert. He adds that he's typing the letter because he's shivering so much he can't write —not from a sea bath, but from a fever that comes with a simple flu.

Tinkering anthropogogy

(1970 - 1984)

In 1970 John Demeester felt that the training of young people under apprenticeship had reached a kind of impasse. Despite the team of advisors' attempts to present the curriculum as integrated projects, many teachers continued to teach lessons divided into subjects. This threatened to bog down the entire training program in an increasingly large bureaucracy, just as is often the case in general education systems. It seems that papers are more important than people. Grades represent standard skills, and little attention is paid to how a child or adolescent views and approaches a problem. An excerpt from an article by a certain *R. Bazin* in a French educational journal catches his attention. He writes about bureaucracy:

> *Bureaucracy: the instrument of power. Once it reaches a certain mass: power itself.*
> *The most human of activities: it has so far employed more men than machines.*
> *It is true that a man can only play his role properly if he functions like a machine.'*

For John, turning people into machines is precisely what standardisation in schooling achieves. And, he continues, the young people who rebel against this demonstrate that they possess common sense. Naturally, they are immediately labeled *maladjusted*. But should people adapt to systems that make them inhuman? Have we entered an evolutionary stage where *Homo Sapiens* split into a small elite branch *Homo Cogitans* while the rest through schooling and manipulation evolves towards the main branch of *Homo Exequi*? The ultimate victory of culture over biology, you might say. He recalls conversations with his father about the rise and

significance of national school systems. It has little to do with law, a lot to do with duty, and even more to do with obligation. Around the same time he's grappling with his understanding of the education system, Canon Houtart gives him a tip to read Paulo Freire's book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which supposedly also has a French translation. John visits Corman and for several days he is completely absorbed in Freire's reading. The technical aspects of teaching people to read and write fit into the structural method his father discussed. But that's far from the most important thing. What interests him is the analysis of the educational system itself. John finds the expression *the banking model of education* very clear. Moreover, Freire's proposal for dialogic education is close to the research with children by Vygotsky and later also by Piaget. After the publication of Vygotsky's work in English and the publication of *The Social Construction of Reality* the term socio-constructivism is increasingly appearing for this form of learning.

He is fascinated by the way Freire demonstrates the contrast between the means of the oppressors and the means of the oppressed, which he describes as *anti-dialoguing actions* and *dialogue-based actions*. Under the first term he puts *conquest, manipulation, divide and conquer* and *cultural invasion*. Under the second term he joins *unity, compassion, organisation* and *cultural synthesis.* John wonders what content Freire gives to the concept *unity* and to what extent this also entails diversity and pluralism. Recently, the librarian at the Institute where John works has become his regular conversation partner and naturally they have several conversations about Freire's theses. One day, the librarian has a book with him and remarks: "I don't know who acquired this book for the library neither why. But you'll probably find it interesting." He hands John a copy of *Vers une pédagogie institutionnelle (Towards an institutional pedagogy)* by Fernand Oury and Aida Vasquez. John reads it in two evenings and immediately informs his direct supervisor that he wants to meet the French teacher. From some newspaper clippings

and French pedagogical magazines compiled by the librarian John understands that the working groups in Institutional Pedagogy in France are a kind of reference movement, complementary to the *ICEM,* the Modern School Cooperative founded by Célestin Freinet who died in 1966. Between lines John understands that the followers of the pedagogical model both of the French ICEM and of the international structure FIMEM that emerged from it, prove little resistant to the pitfalls and hidden charm of petty-bourgeoisness.

While John ponders how to address the percolating influences of apprenticeship training within the school system, Jeanne considers how to manage the seeping influences in Paulo's adolescence. He began his secondary education at the Ostend Atheneum. For the morals course, his parents have to choose between religious education or laic ethics classes. For Paulo, this means he and a few other classmates are relegated to a different classroom. In Catholic Belgium, without a state religion, there is no world orientation or anything else that addresses theism, atheism, gnosticism, and agnosticism together, which would help young people to form their own minds. Instead, they are split up and subjected to imposed thinking patterns chosen by their parents. But Paulo enjoys his classes. The group is small, and he can talk freely with fellow students and the teacher about his own heroes, about his grandfather's life, and about the revolutionary examples he sometimes hears about at home or among his parents' friends. He is also welcomed into a circle of laic adolescents. Although non-church families like to flaunt their liberalism, they do so with their own rituals and centers, which remind John and Jeanne of the French Revolution *temples of reason* they hate. But what Paulo, as a thirteen-year-old boy does of course enjoy is that the other adolescents in those centers organize parties and dancing afternoons. He's happy to participate especially when he discovers that way he can easily flirt with a friend from the girls' school

across the city park. Jeanne soon finds out about this. She speaks to the morals teacher. He gives her a hint about a youth organisation his own son is a member of. And that's how Paulo ends up at the *Jeugdbond voor Natuurstudie* (*Youth Association for Nature Studies)*. Young people aged 12 to 25 go on camp together in the Netherlands, Belgium, and France, where they learn to observe nature, participate in the annual count of migratory birds, and help preserve protected nature reserves such as the Zwin nature reserve and the few protected dune areas on the coast. Paulo especially enjoys the summer and autumn camps. The group usually has access to a barn on a large farm and is allowed to sleep in straw. The annual youth movement congress is held in December, between Christmas and New Year, in a school building. He learns basic guitar chords to accompany singing during evenings around the campfire or after listening to guest speakers. A German campmate goes through the entire youth association's songbook with him, giving each song simple chords. The guitar stays with Paulo until he will be himself a pépé and his stiff fingers make strumming difficult. Furthermore, Paulo and a group from the Youth Association occasionally go out to sea with fishermen when they are given permission, on small observation assignments of marine fauna.

In faraway Portugal, Maria Coelho has emigrated to Évora, some sixty kilometers from her birth village. This way, she can continue her schooling after the four compulsory years at the village school. She and her best girlfriend live with the parents of an older girlfriend from the same village. The two girls dream of becoming teachers themselves. And that might not be entirely impossible. Maria's parents decided to emigrate to Northern Europe three years earlier to have enough money to send Maria and her brother to school and built their own home. Maria certainly hopes to be able to fulfil her dream. If you are born in the second half of the twentieth century in inland Portugal, in a village without electricity

or running water, where almost the entire population worked as day labourers for latifundia and the café owners are the wealthiest people in the village a girl can only dream of becoming a teacher or a nurse to escape poverty and the hard work of farm labourers…

In early 1971, the Masereelfonds is established in Flanders and takes over the *Ostend Center for Popular Education* as a local branch. When Bob Claessens dies in August, the branch adopts the name *Bob Claessens Center*. The center takes into account the programming of other organisations to avoid competing with them and reports all its activities to the Cultural Council, which publishes the cultural calendar.

After a debate in a series of '*Conversations with philosophers and sociologists*' with Ludo Abicht just before the philosopher leaves for Cincinnati, the book *In Bluebeard's castle: Some notes towards the redefinition of culture* by Georges Steiner is discussed. John thinks he should read the book, because what it says reminds him of his conversations with his late father-in-law, Lucien. Steiner's analysis of the period from the Franco-German conflicts until the end of the war against Nazi Germany bears a resemblance to one of Lucien's beloved theses: that the humiliations inflicted on the vanquished at the end of each war contained within them the seeds of the next one. Steiner describes this period as a modern version of the medieval Hundred Years' War. Moreover, according to Steiner, the surprising idea that the end of times had arrived because everything that could be discovered has been discovered, would have brought a kind of boredom, especially to the British aristocracy, so that rekindling the war would have been a welcome distraction. *Homo Pugnax.*

That evening, John is accompanied by a Portuguese priest, pedagogue, and sociologist. He works for the Portuguese Ministry of Labour and has applied for a series of visits to vocational training centers to learn about the structure of apprenticeship training.

There might be of interest for training in Portugal. The visits and related activities must have made a good impression on him, and towards the end of July, a letter from Lisbon takes a personal turn;

My dear John,

It's been a month since I returned from my visit to Belgium. I haven't written yet because I wasn't sure I'd find you in Oostende because of your usual vacation in France

I hope and wish with all my heart for the health of all, and especially that your wife and Anne are better from her illnesses.

First of all, I would like to thank you for the welcome you and your family gave me during my stay, your natural understanding of my situation and your availability and willingness to help resolve it.

I increasingly want to find some work abroad and a residence permit because the circle around me is closing more every day and I remain anxious about being surprised; there is talk everywhere of a ministerial remodelling in our country and I am risking being without work, which for me at this time would be dramatic. I think it would be good for me to leave Portugal during the first half of September.

It is terrible to remain in a worrying uncertainty when one is 45 years old; on the other hand I feel full of strength and very eager to work, ensuring my economic future and stability, which will allow me to live quietly and peacefully, to be able to devote myself to others and to integrate myself into some groups of promotion and culture where I can give my contribution and receive from them the counterpart.

That's why I told you that I accept any job, especially in a company, in a factory for example, as a worker, because I believe in the dignity of any work that, in any way, contributes to the development of the world and I even have a certain desire to remain in a job where I am anonymous; with 23 years as a public man, I have tasted enough the experience of prestige. I feel the need for a little silence around me. Believe me, it's true!

It doesn't matter if my work is not well paid at the beginning; I must take it upon myself to conquer a place of work with diligence and

determination like all other men, and that interests me: to follow in the footsteps of the poor and the workers. At this moment, what interests me absolutely is to obtain some kind of job and a residence permit; everything else will come later.

My dear John, now my case is more urgent and I ask you again not to worry about getting me a good job; what interests me more is getting a residence permit. But I want all this on the condition that I do not cause you any great inconvenience.

I have to take my vacation from August 10th to September 10th approximately and I would really like not to return so as not to take things at the beginning that I cannot continue.

Please excuse this kind of abuse of your very kind and generous friendship.

The man goes on with his request with a letter at the end of August, announcing that he could also go to Canada, but prefers Belgium. In September, he is in Brussels and submits a curriculum vitae. And in mid-November, news arrives from Montreal that he has found a modest position for $10 a day. When John discusses this episode with his friends of the Communist Party, they point out that changes might be afoot in Portugal now that the former dictator has died and Marcel Caetano has taken over. Although the overseas wars continue unabated, decolonisation is not yet discussed, and Portugal is far from democratic, the current prime minister seems to be bring in some change. Whether the conservatives, led by the President will allow this remains to be seen. But perhaps the reforms in several ministries, including public instruction are the reason why the priest who visited John is choosing not to take the risk and prefers to emigrate.

Shortly afterwards, one of the Oostende associations organises a presentation on electricity production through large dam lakes and the consequences for the local population. *Vilarinho das Furnas* in Northern Portugal is one of the examples. The priest has certainly

never spoken to John about it. The dam is almost finished, and the inauguration is scheduled for early next year. Meanwhile, the village *Vilarinho* is already completely evacuated, the inhabitants had emigrated to other municipalities in the Minho region of Portugal or had left for abroad two years earlier. With the disappearance of the municipality, the community organisation also disappears, as is still often the case in small municipalities in this region of inland Portugal, far from the capital and the regime established there. This community organisation is a kind of contemporary continuation of the Visigothic *conventus publicus vicinorum* as already described shortly after the French Revolution. In the community organisation, the *Junta (Board or Council)*, all the village heads of families reside. This is normally the man of the family, unless he is absent.*Vilarinho* for example has had already emigrants before the final evacuation of the village. In the event of death, the widow who is left behind becomes the head of the family. The *Junta* is led by the *Juiz* or *Zelador*, elected for a six-month term. His first task is to bring the *Board* together usually every Thursday after dinner. In Vilarinho, the summons is issued by blowing a cow horn, and everyone gathers in one of the village's two squares. Anyone who is still absent after the second summons is fined half an escudo, payable at the next meeting. Anyone absent for the entire meeting can be fined by performing a mandatory service to the community, depending on their needs. The *Zelador* kept track of these services and designates who will perform each service. Fines can also be issued when complaints are addressed about anyone not complying with the adopted rules, without exception, including the Zelador. However, everyone had the right to self-defense. After the complaints are dealt with, the remaining meeting time is to discuss requested topics, recorded by the *Zelador* and presented during the meeting. All matters relating to the community are open to discussion, from communal herding of cattle, improving roads or walls, to places where wood could be cut,

building water reservoirs, chasing away wolves, etc.
Every six months the *Zelador* passes the task to the next elected representative, who also receives custody of the common fund. In *Vilarinho* all agreements were written down. Much later, Paulo would see examples of tally sticks on which illiterate communities recorded agreements and accounts. John speaks with Louis about what he heard at the lecture. Can one speak of oppressed and oppressors in this case in the sense Paulo Freire speaks of? Do you have his division here between *anti-dialogizing actions* and *dialogue-based actions.* According to John, the reality seems a little more nuanced.

Paulo recently becomes involved in the first student council elections at school. He is then drawn to some classmates who are involved in Maoist circles. John smiles as he observes that May 1968 has descended into their son's bedroom when Jeanne shows him the *little red book* that lays untouched on Paulo's desk for several weeks. John ponders how he can help Paulo remain critical, even of different ideologies, regardless of his sympathies. He reads him a quote from Neill's book *Liberty not Anarchy:*

'A very disturbed young demon:
Master, master, something horrible has happened:
the people of Earth have discovered the Truth!
The devil smiles:
Don't worry, my child, I will send someone to make it a dogma.'

It's a simple contribution from John, and that's something Paulo will admire him for the rest of his life. His father doesn't give answers or impose a thought process, but rather gives him something to think about. After a few visits to the meeting room of the local young Maoists, he no longer feels comfortable there. He'd much rather spend his time off from school in the *Youth Association for Nature Studies.* The campmates are serious when it comes to counting birds or identifying plants with a certain degree of

precision, but otherwise, their minds are relaxed. They aren't revolutionary, dogmatic do-gooders, but simply young people with a critical mind who observe the degradation of natural areas and point out the aggressive attitude of owners, whether they be farmers, industrial corporations, or individual fortune-makers. They are also critical of those aristocrats who claim to maintain the natural balance in their personal domains and protected areas by organising selective hunts among the elite. They point out the ignorance of bird trappers who injure and kill legally protected birds with illegal nets. Many of them don't believe everything can be solved by violence, although they do occasionally resort to acts of vandalism, such as destroying illegal trapping nets. They talk, sing, and teach each other folk dances. The songs and music come from all four corners of the globe, without any party-political connotation. The elders, who have embarked on higher education or are certified nature guides, offer their knowledge. Anyone making intolerant remarks is quickly reprimanded or even risked being laughed at. Paulo feels much more at home there than among dogmatic doomsayers, whether they place the absolute truth in the words of a transcendental figure or a human figure.

In South America Chile (*Zone 3 Anahuac*), socialist Salvador Allende is elected president. His government immediately begins implementing its program, which focusses on improved social services for the entire population, largely funded by deprivatizing the foreign-owned companies exploiting the region's wealth. This immediately cause considerable resentment among non-Chilean property owners and investors. These worshippers of the Golden Calf immediately find allies among the local conservative elite to launch disinformation campaigns. When Fidel Castro, still the successful leader of Cuba come on a state visit a year after the elections, he carefully observes what the government describes as peaceful developments for the benefit of the entire population and

warns: "*We are witnessing a process of transformation being undertaken by revolutionaries who are implementing change through peaceful means. (…) The question that naturally arises, at least for a visitor, is whether the historical law of resistance and violence on the part of the exploiters will apply in Chile. Never in history have the reactionaries, the exploiters, the privileged of a social system resigned themselves to peacefully tolerating change*."

Paulo hears his parents, as well as his older friends in the youth club, discussing it. Will Chile be an example of peaceful change?

Artists are also invited by Allende to visit Chile. Among them the Greek musician and composer Mikis Theodorakis, who was recently released from a concentration camp by the Greek colonels' regime and then exiled. During his visit to Valparaíso, he hears young people recite texts by the poet and writer Pablo Neruda. Impressed by the *Canto General* he promises to dedicate a musical evocation of it.

In 1972, the older youth of the Association for Nature Study responded enthusiastically to the publication of *The limits to growth.*The book is based on research conducted by MIT in Boston and commissioned by the Club of Rome, a foundation comprised of scientists and entrepreneurs. Interestingly, the commissioner is partly made up of entrepreneurs. This makes it difficult for other entrepreneurs and investors to claim that the report is the work of left-wing scientists and doomsayers, although some do adopt that attitude. Paulo and his friends study the differences between linear and exponential growth, and with Jeanne's help, Paulo also learns how to combine different graphs to sketch future scenarios for a given phenomenon. He is naturally interested in population, agriculture, and nature reserves, but also in the increasing influence of industry on pollution and what that means for the health of the population and the planet. At school, he tries to get his history and geography teachers to discuss the report, but he consistently receives the response that such political topics are not on the

curriculum. The ‘Belgian’ topics are of course with a classical European interpretation of history drenched in a watered-down Greek, Roman and Judea-Christian cultural sauce. An atlas is used for the geography program that primarily maps Belgium in Europe, and Congo and Katanga in Africa. Peoples are categorised by religion, race, and level of civilization, with Europe and the United States of America designated as advanced, while the least advanced are found in South America and Africa. There is no explanation for the color designations, indicating the criteria for labeling a nation as civilised or uncivilised. Mining industries are a kind of eternal value. A less attentive student might deduce from the atlas that Belgium is the most important country in the world, with 17 plates and maps, while many European countries, let alone other continents, share one, or at most two, maps. The Iberian Peninsula is entitled to two plates, but you have to look hard to see that it’s actually two countries. None *Club of Rome* can outweigh such a nationalistic curriculum… which, according to the teachers, is not political at all.
Paulo’s math teacher also rejects his request. He has no time to utilise algebraic functions, Cartesian axes, parabolas, hyperbolas, straight and curved lines for the MIT research. John hears Paulo’s constant indignation and sighs at dinner that evening. He struggles to convince the vocational teachers to connect projects with general knowledge. Apparently, general schools are also not at all inclined to view children and young people as a place that fosters their eagerness to learn. No, they are only expected to work through the standard package of data to be recorded. *Mass* has the right to follow her *mediocre* course.

John is delighted that he has finally been given permission to contact Fernand Oury. In March, he and his friend the librarian will visit the French teacher in the Paris suburbs. The conversation focuses primarily on classroom management, in which children or

young people work with teachers to develop the work environment, create and maintain work schedules. John wants to specifically discuss the teachers he supervises; Fernand Oury assumes that the teachers in the institutional pedagogy study groups only talk about what they have done. Reading monographs followed by a short internship could be useful for teachers. He doubts whether he can be useful for subject teachers. Nevertheless, they will continue corresponding, and an internship is being discussed.
John takes advantage of his short stay in Paris to browse through book and record stores. In one of the shops near the *Boulevard Saint Michel* he hears about a new project by Mikis Theodorakis who still lives in Paris. Of course, like many of his friends, he knows the musician from Zorba the Greek. But now Theodorakis is reportedly composing an oratorio based on texts by the Chilean author Pablo Neruda, who won the Nobel Prize for Literature last year. John buys a Spanish copy of his Canto General.
John continues interested in the work of Paulo Freire. Corman Bookstore alerts him to the availability of a Dutch translation of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and John immediately has some copies purchased for the library of the Institute where he works.
The book is so successful that a second edition is released almost immediately. This makes John somewhat suspicious. His suspicions grow when he hears the effortless assertion that the emancipation struggle of Latin American farmworkers bears a striking resemblance to that of the youth movement of May 1968. He fears that they are trying to turn critical social analysis into a method, reducing liberation philosophy to adult literacy teaching methods. He makes a few brief internal comments to encourage teachers once again to adopt a meaningful approach to the curriculum, focusing on projects, even with children. There is little interest.

His communist friends seemed to have correctly assessed the development in Portugal: there is no general democratization.

However, under pressure from the less conservative bourgeoisie, a proposal for reform of the Minister of Public Instruction is on her way spearheaded by Minister Veiga Simão. Immediately, sectors of the conservative and staunchly Catholic population are calling the proposals subversive. And yet, it only concerns extending compulsory education from six to eight years, with the promise of free education for all, an increase in the number of kindergartens, and improved social assistance for toddler care. Adult education is also being considered. Consultations are underway with public and private organisations on all these proposals. *A Voz do Operário* organizes two full days of debate. There are interventions from schools whose corps had or has relations with *LIEN*. The director of the João de Deus nursery school is also present. The minutes state, among other things, that the participants in the debate strongly advocate for a national public network of nursery schools.

In early 1973, the peace declarations are signed in Paris, ending the war and American intervention in Vietnam. John tells Jeanne that, in the long run, that war must have seemed as meaningless to the American boys as the First World War had become to the young German and Belgian soldiers, a topic her father occasionally mentioned. Jeanne replies that, as her father had also said, perhaps for any young man conscripted into military service, a war situation must seem mostly meaningless. Paulo listens to his parents and takes the opportunity to say that if he is drafted, he intends to refuse military service and do alternative service in some humanitarian organisation. John notes that Paulo's former revolutionary comrades might not approve of his decision. Paulo replies that both Pépé Lucien and his father himself provided him with the most compelling reasons for making this decision.

The new school year has just begun. Paulo hears that a bloody coup has taken place in Chile and that Allende is dead. Two weeks later, he reads the translated transcript of Salvador Allende's last

radio message in the monthly magazine “Vrede”:

This may be my last chance to speak to you. The air force has bombed the transmitters of the other pro-government radio stations. I say this without bitterness, but with disappointment. And my words will be a moral condemnation of those who broke their military oath, the leaders of the troops: Admiral Merino, who appointed himself commander of the fleet, the dishonourable General Cesar Mendoza, who yesterday swore allegiance to the government and today declares himself leader of the Carabineers.

Faced with this betrayal, I can only say one thing to the workers: I will not surrender. At this crossroads in history, I am prepared to pay for the loyalty of my people with my life. And I am convinced that it will be impossible to destroy the seed we have sown in the consciousness of thousands upon thousands of Chileans.

The traitors hold power. They can oppress us, but neither power nor crime can stop social progress.

History is ours, for it is made by the people.

Workers of my country, I thank you for the loyalty you have always shown, for the trust you were willing to place in the man who was merely the interpreter of the deep desire for justice and who, when he swore to respect law and the Constitution, kept his word.

When I address you at this supreme and decisive hour, I want you to understand one thing: foreign capital, imperialism in alliance with reaction, have created the conditions in which the army has violated the tradition of General Schneider, a victim of the same social strata that have now retreated to their homes, waiting for power to return to their hands to continue defending their incomes and privileges. I address myself above all to the simple woman in the fields, to the peasant woman who believed in us, to the worker who worked tirelessly, to the Chilean mother who knew that the Popular Front government was caring for her children.

I address the specialists, the patriots, those who continued to work despite the sabotage of the union bureaucrats who—they too—defended the profits granted to them by capital. I address the youth, those who devoted themselves heart and soul to our struggle. I address the people of Chile, the worker, the peasant, the intellectual, those who

will yet be persecuted, because fascism has long been at work in our country: terrorist attacks, blown-up bridges, destroyed pipelines, and the silence of those who could have spoken—all this is the expression of fascism.

Perhaps in a few moments, Radio Magallanes will be silent and my voice will no longer be able to reach you. It doesn't matter. I will always be heard, I will always be with you, and I will be remembered as a worthy and honest man.

Workers of my fatherland, I believe in humanity and its future. Others will survive this dark and bitter hour, when treason vie for power. Therefore, the day is not far off when a broad road will once again open up for free people to build a better life.

Long live Chile, long live the Chilean people, long live the workers. These are my last words. And I am convinced that my death will not be in vain. I am certain that it will at least serve as a lesson and a condemnation of falsehood, cowardice, and betrayal.

Paulo is deeply affected. He thinks not only of Allende, but also of Gandhi, two persons who claimed that change is possible through nonviolent resistance combined with a peaceful struggle for reforms, both assassinated. Is “pacific struggle” a contradiction in terms? Naturally, he also recalls the words of Fidel Castro, which his parents and their friends discussed two years ago. Could it be that change must be imposed? Should arrogant leaders be replaced by other arrogant leaders who force people to accept that they will provide them with a better life? That was, in a sense, the Bolshevik position, and you can’t really say that it has been a success in practice so far. According to his grandfather and parents, one might wonder whether compulsory schooling has a humanist or a nationalist background. But does that also mean that compulsory schooling is never the solution for allowing people to develop their own ideas and only contributes to the adoption of others’ ideas? He knows from personal experience how teachers are unsympathetic, or even aggressive, when students ask questions out of curiosity. Can compulsory education prevent it from ultimately benefiting

only new elites who assimilate some of the old elites? Can the obligation to acquire knowledge lead to a point where, at a certain point, the obligation is no longer necessary, because the desire to learn outweighs the obligation? And is an unlimited desire to learn possible in a world where possessing money and power is equated with success in life? He tries to explain to his parents what he's thinking. John gives him the Dutch translation of the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and indicates the passage on banking education.

In the same issue of the magazine Vrede, Paulo reads that the political committee of the *General Assembly of the United Nations* approved with 84 votes in favour, 3 against, and 23 abstentions, a resolution against apartheid policies in South Africa. The representatives of the United States, Great Britain, and Portugal voted against. Paulo immediately thinks that if the Belgian envoy only represents a government formed by party leaders after every Belgian voted for one or another representative of a party, and therefore only expresses the opinion of a segment of the Belgian population, the envoy of a country like Portugal represents the people even less. In this case, the envoy speaks only on behalf of a certain class that refuses to hear about the independence of "overseas territories" and perhaps sees South Africa's apartheid laws as a safeguard for its own policies, especially in neighbouring Mozambique, but also in Angola. How false, then, to say that Portugal is voting against?

Now that Paulo is in high school, he's been given the option of learning a fourth language. He wants to learn German, but Jeanne objects, even almost 30 years after the war ended. So he enrols in Spanish. All in all, it is a good choice. He's part of a small group that, thanks to conversations with the teacher, quickly developed a fairly large vocabulary. Paulo's interest in Spanish is infectious, and John books a family weekend in Paris in December, including tickets for an evening concert by the Argentinian singer Atahualpa Yupanqui. During the concert, the singer performs *Basta Ya!*

(*Enough is Enough):*

¡Ay! Ya viene la madrugada,
Los gallos están cantando.
Compadre, están anunciando
que ya empieza la jornada... Ay... Ay...
¡Ay! Al vaivén de mi carreta
nació esta lamentación.
Compadre, ponga atención
que ya empieza mi cuarteta.
No tenemos protección... Ay... Ay...
Trabajo para el inglés,
trabajo de carretero,
sudando por un dinero,
que en la mano no se ve... Ay... Ay...
¡Basta ya! ¡Basta Ya!
¡Basta ya que el yanqui mande!
El yanqui vive en palacio
yo vivo en uno ¡barracón!
¿Como es posible que viva
el yanqui mejor que yo?
¡Basta ya! ¡Basta ya!
¡Basta ya que el yanqui mande!
¿Qué pasa con mis hermanos
de Méjico Y Panamá?
Sus padres fueron esclavos,
¡sus hijos no lo serán!
¡Basta ya! ¡Basta ya!
¡Basta ya que el yanqui mande!
Yo de pequeño aprendí
a luchar por esa paz.
De grande lo repetí
y a la cárcel fui a parar.
¡Basta ya! ¡Basta ya!
¡Basta ya que el yanqui mande!
¿Quién ha ganado la guerra
en los montes del Viet-Nam ?

El guerrillero en su tierra
Y el yanqui en el cinema.

Is American industry and American investors the main culprit? Perhaps more so in Latin America than in other parts of the world? But isn't the whole model of land acquisition, of land exploration by any investing company the problem? Is investing bad? Or is the unequal distribution of products made possible by investments the problem? Or does one part of the world insist on having what another part of the world cannot have? He recently read *Deschooling Society* by Priest Ivan Illich. He found the book on his father's bookshelf. Illich talks about the impossibility of making the whole world live like the better-off citizens of the United States, simply because there aren't enough resources to make it happen. He recalls the conversations about that research *The Limits to Growth* published by the Club of Rome after which he takes up the booklet *Towards a new lifestyle: conditions for happier coexistence* also by Illich, he received as a gift from John a few days ago while they were browsing together at Corman's bookstore. He also questions whether Yupanqui's song is a call to nonviolence, simply a pessimist, or thinking at the final verses a more humorous hopeful note.

During the first months of 1974, political refugees from Chile come in almost everywhere in Europe, including in Belgium. A number of families are temporarily accommodated in a holiday village near Oostende which is closed in wintertime. A call goes out for volunteers who speak Spanish to help them navigate the bureaucratic process required for residence permits. Paulo, despite his limited knowledge, was willing to try his luck, so John drives him to the holiday village. Thanks in part to the help of the Chileans staying there Paulo's Spanish improves dramatically, while John befriends Marcos Portnoy, an author and theater director from Valparaíso who also fascinates Paulo. He and his family had

endured terrible times, and only thanks to the efforts of people at the Belgian embassy did they manage to escape the military political police. During an evening walk on the beach, Marcos looks at the cloudless sky and let Paulo point out the constellations. Then he says with his special sense of humor: “Who would have thought General Pinochet would offer me the opportunity to see the North Star and the Big Dipper…”
Marcos talks to John about Neruda and about theater. He says he hopes to see Mikis Theodorakis’ Canto General someday. When the Kursaal in Oostende programs the oratorio directed by the author, John immediately secures seats for both families. Paulo is overwhelmed by the music and the singing.
Marcos and John discuss education, specifically the andragogical model developed by Paulo Freire. John discusses the monographs published by the teachers of the Institutional Pedagogy Group. He is quite critical of those who separate educational science from practice.

In April, the war waged by the Portuguese government in its “overseas territories” seems to come to end. A group of captains decides to stage a coup and establishes a provisional government to achieve civilian democracy and immediate decolonisation. It is still unclear what will result from this coup. Both local and international observers speak of a nonviolent revolution. When, a few days later, photos of soldiers with carnations in their gun barrels appear everywhere, the term “Carnation Revolution” becomes widely used to refer to the spring events in Portugal. John thinks back to the priest employed by the Ministry of Instruction. Would he now return to his country, or was it precisely because the changes were already palpable among those working for the deposed government that he chose to emigrate to Canada? For the time being it appears the provisional government is pursuing a Marxist course which, according to John and his Chilean friends, will be viewed with

suspicion by the United States government. The United States policy is also discussed in connection with the recent Nobel Peace Prize, *Secretary of State* Henry Kissinger. According to John's friends this is a cold pragmatic realist who only serves the interests of the American powers and achieved peace in Vietnam not for the sake of the well-being of the Vietnamese people, but because this hopeless war was costing the American economy too much. John's Chilean friends have no doubt that the American intelligence services cooperated in the ousting of the democratically elected government of the Popular Front and that Henry Kissinger was obviously aware of this. Moreover several NATO observers have already hinted that the American government is long concerned about Portugal. Before the Carnation Revolution there was a concern about the ongoing colonial conflict because it would bring the opposition in Africa under communist influence, a reason to stop the war. Now this is apparently the case there is new concern. What if NATO countries like Portugal and Italy suddenly have a communists in government and therefore communist policies? In John's discussion group there are those who believe that the Nobel Peace Prize is ultimately a deception of the people that can be used to put cynical rulers in a slightly better light.

Things aren't going well for Mathieu Corman. Last year, he was accused of seducing an underage girl who ran away from home and allegedly spent the night in one of Corman's bookstores. The father then allegedly coerced his daughter into confessing, with all the consequences for the bookstore owner. When John heard the story he can't help but think it was lifted straight from the book *Doctor Vlimmen* by Anton Roothaert. But things end much worse for Mathieu Corman than for Roothaert's character. After a short prison sentence, he is released on parole and is never heard from again. And then, in mid-February 1975, his body is found with a bullet in his head.

Shortly before this, John made a stop in Leuven after a visit to Tienen where he attended the public session on the occasion of the awarding of an *Honoris Causa* to Paulo Freire. He is impressed by the andragogue's speech but is also convinced that the academy's fieldwork is more important than its rituals. He wonders how many of those in the room can truly imagine the liberating nature of taking charge of one's own history, and how many, among those who truly can, consistently continue to explore how to work with people rather than for them, as Freire puts it.

In Portugal, enthusiastic teachers are mobilising their high school students for literacy campaigns in the interior. Maria Coelho in Évora is part of a small group of students traveling to her native region with the aim of teaching people to read and write. They have read some texts by Paulo Freire in preparation, but generally lack the technical foundation to use the vocabulary they glean from the conversations in a structured manner. Furthermore, many farmworkers do have some understanding of their condition. They don't necessarily feel liberated from oppression once large landowners flee and hand over their properties to caretakers or simply abandon them. Few of the cooperatives established by politically active volunteers succeed in properly managing large estates. And these will struggle to survive a few years later, under an agrarian policy implemented by moderate governments prisoned in the International Monetary Fund's conditions for lending money to the near-bankrupt state.

During the summer, John and Jeanne take some young Chilean friends on a trip to the German Democratic Republic (GDR). They intend to visit Prague as well, but a bureaucratic problem with the young people's entry visas forces John and Jeanne to go alone. John takes up his pen and writes an imaginary letter to the president of the country:

Mr. President,

I must first tell you that I love this country and that I believe in the socialist future of the world.

Then, as this is only the second time I have come as a tourist and I don't even know the language, I will be careful not to make any judgments about anything. Please therefore consider this letter as a provisional attempt to give you my impressions - however superficial - of these two visits as an interested observer.

We talk a lot about freedom and our free world. It is obvious that everything is possible in the 'free world' when you have the economic means. I do not want to discuss this freedom, which is nothing but deception. As for the other freedom, this freedom of spirit that for centuries has characterised the history not only of Prague but of the entire country, I believe that it exists and that it is tangible. It exists in open-mindedness, in the sense of aesthetics, in spontaneous kindness towards foreigners, in this kind of spirit of rebellion that we believe we can discern among you, my fellow citizens.

But then why this censorship of certain publications? Why do customs officers have to carefully read the women's magazines we brought for a friend who will read them with a so-called professional eye?

Why is it that the two radios in my hotel room only allow me to listen to Czechoslovakian stations, which prevents me from keeping up with current events?

Why this almost misplaced distrust towards these two young Chileans, fleeing from the fascist regime in their country, who were promised a tourist entry visa in Belgium but that could only be issued after 15 days?

You see, Mr. President, they were so happy to be able to spend four days in Prague - almost as compensation for their exile.

No doubt your administrative services could not have acted any faster - this is a universal problem in our increasingly congested and bureaucratised world. Nevertheless, I allow myself to believe that this tendency must be combated, wherever it may be, and that it should be associated less with the difficult construction of socialism than with the chaos of influences and powers under capitalism.

So, Mr. President, I ask myself these questions without passing judgment. But I am convinced, and history has shown it many times, that neither systematic mistrust nor censorship in any form whatsoever has ever been able to help put into practice an ideal that must ultimately take shape through the trust of those who are called upon to realise it.

Please believe, Mr. President, the expression of respect from a Belgian tourist who is trying to understand a country he loves and the paths of socialism in which he believes.

In Prague John and Jeanne meet their friend, who works as an official interpreter and, to stay in touch with contemporary French, asked them to bring along French magazines. She explains how the university makes it difficult for non-Communist Party members to teach. When John notes that other criteria must also be taken into account, she replies that trust is bureaucratically analysed and that competence is rarely discussed. John brings this up when they go to pick up the friends who stayed behind in the GDR. The children of refugees living here burst out laughing. They tell him how the school checks who participates in certain organized after-school youth activities. Moreover, they criticise the school. The parents laugh and explain how everything is taken so seriously here. In Chile, they say, the socialist action was a party, a celebration; here it's a kind of religious dogmatic ritual. When John asks for more information, he quickly understands that the secondary school they're talking about is, in terms of organisation a carbon copy of the school in Belgium. He reflects on the role of Christian, liberal, and party-affiliated youth organisations, and even the youth and nature association Paulo is so fond of. How can a community, let alone a nation, ensure that these organisations open the minds of young people to dialogue and understanding diversity, rather than narrowing them to a single idea of unity? And does a community even want to do that?

Just before Paulo 'disappears' to Ghent to start his training as a

primary school teacher, John says about the school: “If I’m correct, Freinet considered the *Laic School* as an institution devoid of any form of dogmatism or sectarianism: everyone would be welcome there — Christians, other believers, social democrats, anarchists, communists. Now it turns out that not only in France, but also in those countries called socialist by those in power, the secular school doesn’t have a cosmopolitan model, but rather an indoctrinating one. Instead of learning to deal with diversity, it strives for a kind of unified thinking that aligns with the elite’s thinking.”

“So actually not that different from what happened and still happens in classical church-determined education,” Paulo is surprised.

“That’s the conclusion I've come to, yes. Your grandfather Louis says this is a typical example of almost all the school systems he has information about. Here in Belgium, moreover, the state schools more or less impose the Catholic/non-Catholic duality, which I think should not be the case. State schools, in the sense of what I said earlier about laic schools, should allow everyone to learn to think together about living in diversity. But I fear that the elite — or should I say elites? — once again prefer to maintain a divide-and-rule policy. That easily resonates with untrained minds who are looking for ways to exert their own little power over those who would like to follow them. Incorporating a unified mindset into schools is one strategy; keeping groups separated so that any group can accuse the other, another.

“And according to you, teachers like Freinet or Oury are standing up against this?”, asks Paulo.

“I don't know if they’ll object to this. What I hear them say is that they’re building a working model, not a method. And that working model encompasses *cooperation.* For me cooperative working together is a way to preserve, understand, and refine diversity, all in pursuit of a common project. And for me, that project is approaching the common good of humanity in a sustainable,

ecologically balanced society.

Two months later, John Paulo suggests accompanying him on a working visit to a cooperative class in a Parisian suburb. There, he meets John's pen pal, Claude Azuará. Claude is responsible for a group of adolescents who have been marginalised from the school of unified thinking and sent to a kind of adjustment class. They deviate from the school's criteria for acceptable diversity and must therefore be adapted or disappear, says John. Paulo observes how the pupils are, for Claude, full-fledged conversation partners who review each accepted project together, exploring what each of them already knows and what each of them proposes to learn to successfully complete such a project. Claude talks with them about the similarities and differences between guiding children and adults in their learning process. What interests all three of them is the learning processes of those who don't have the right to speak, or whose voice has been taken away, and therefore rarely have the opportunity to shape their own learning process. Claude clearly sees a key difference between children and adults: at what point does a child who can speak possess sufficient history and reflective capacity to guide its own learning process? According to John it's a continuous process that begins as soon as children say their first words and are supported by adults in using them socially.

On the way home, Paulo asks his father if he understood correctly that John sees the learning processes of children and adults as a continuous evolution, not as separate processes with possible similarities. John replies: "It seems to me insufficient to consider only how adolescents and adults directly help their own learning process, but also — and according to Claude, sometimes especially — the way in which previous conversation partners of those adolescents or adults, through an aggressive or paternalistic attitude, forced them into indifference and often submission. This attitude leads to resignation in some pupils, in others to aggression,

but it is always a serious disruption of a dialogical learning process. Such a learning process, which demands mutual trust, was made impossible for a shorter or longer period of time, sometimes even permanently. Incidentally, when we speak of *pedagogy for adults*, or of a pedagogue who works with adults, do we infantilize that adult? Isn't this infantilisation what consciously or unconsciously goes on in the minds of those who claim to work as pedagogues with adolescents or adults?"

"Is pedagogue the wrong word when you think about guiding people's learning processes?" asks Paulo.

"I think we need to work more on the concept of learning. The act of learning is of the learner, who is guided or mentored by whoever I prefer to refer to as ***anthropo***gogue and not ***andra***gogue."

"But isn't that not the term that is often used when talking about pedagogy for adults?" says Paulo.

"I think there are two problems with that term," John resumes. "As you have known for a long time, the preposition *-peda-* is derived from the Ancient Greek word for child, and *-gogue* comes from the Ancient Greek verb *gogein*, which means to lead or guide. A pedagogue for adults is therefore a contradiction in terms, unless you consider the adult a child, hence my comment about infantilisation. You could, of course, say that whoever keeps slaves like cattle, whoever oppresses people, aims for dependency. The pedagogy of the oppressed is certainly somewhat more humane than the ***zoo***gogy of the oppressed," he jokes."

"But then *andragogue.* That's okay, right?" says Paulo.

"Well, it's perhaps a more subtle matter of word choice," John observes. "I see the preposition — *antro-* (man), more like the couple with *-gyne-* (woman). *Anthropo-* in my opinion has more to do with human, so man ***and*** woman. As I see it, the function of the ***anthropo***gogue has been around since people, men and women, sought to gather and share knowledge, even if that function wasn't explicitly described at the time. For guiding children's learning

processes, the old word *pedagogue* was retained although in Ancient Greece it was originally more about guiding children themselves than their learning process. As I see it, the meaning broadens, especially in what are called modern times, once children gain their own status and are no longer seen as miniature adults. That's why, for me, the word "onderwijzer" (the one who leads to wisdom, the teacher) has a broader etymological scope than what is also called "schoolmaster.: It is the person who provides the foundation for those who pursue wisdom, an *anthropogogue*, that is."

Paulo thinks about this for a while. Then he says, "Is that the reason for your interest in institutional pedagogy? Or, to extend your reasoning, should I call it institutional anthropogogy?"

John laughs. "Yes, that would be a nice term for the general character of a structure in which I can place dialogical learning. And I think I perceive that structure in what Fernand and Jean Oury mean by *Institutional Pedagogy*. The term, by the way, comes from *Institutional Psychotherapy* of the group in Laborde, where Jean Oury works with people with mental disorders. But it's clear that Fernand Oury's primary focus is on working with children, in the classroom, within the public school system.

When they get home, John gives Paulo a text he received from Fernand Oury when they first met. In it, he reads:

> *Institutional pedagogy.*
>
> *From a profusion of theories and techniques that irrigate the critical fields of new pedagogies, we can distinguish two important currents of institutional pedagogy: the cooperative current "Oury - Vasquez" and the self-management current "Lobrot - Lourau - Lapassade".*
>
> *These two currents have in common that they attempt to go beyond both the psychological or psycho-sociological approach, which privileges the individual or the group while neglecting institutional determinations, and the sociological approach, which sees in these determinations only their formal and static structure and not the dynamic processes which innervate them.*
>
> *Institutionalist movements have developed a praxis of involving agents*

(educator and educated) in educational action because they could not develop outside the place where the rules of the institution are put in place.

The cooperative movement, which gradually evolved from Freinet's work, hardly questions the principles and does not radically question the school as a social institution; while simultaneously referring to the conceptual system of psychoanalysis, it acts at the level of the unconscious foundations of the life of the class-group. It has mainly deployed its action in the popular environment from which come the students who populate the marginal sector constituted by the advanced training classes, the transition cycle and the practical terminal cycle.

The self-management movement, using the principles of group dynamics, tries to bring out the idea of a school self-managed by all its members; it rejects the school hierarchy by means of a catharsis that destroys any relationship of domination, to end up, little by little, shaking any social hierarchy; at its culmination point, the educated person, having become autonomous, is no longer willing to submit, his submission constituting the protective shell behind which he reserved the right to flourish on the margins. This movement has found its field of application in private secondary education and in higher education.

Paulo pauses his reading here. He suspects his father continues to view the two movements as a single entity, and that, as a result of his work in vocational training for young people, as well as with young entrepreneurs developing micro-enterprises, he harbours a kind of utopian dream of establishing small, economically sustainable cooperatives. Then he continues reading:

Some definitions

***The institution**: is a material (geographical, architectural, etc.) or symbolic place (that is to say, codifying individual behaviours in a sometimes unconscious way). This given is the force of inertia of the institution. It is the space of classifications, of divisions (administration-management / teacher-class) which appears most obviously. But there is also, in this given, the unsaid, the unthought, the invisible which institutional practice aims precisely to bring to light. The institution, seen from its dynamic angle, implies a play of*

forces which are sometimes liberating, sometimes structuring (roles, statuses).

***The instituted**: the given or organized set of norms and rules that form the basis of the institution. It is the system of values, cultural and ideological models, statuses and roles, which forms the institutionalized (material and symbolic) basis of the institution.*

***The instituting one**: appears as a "negation, a contestation of the instituted". In the dialectic of institutional struggles, the instituting expresses the moment when the agents, actors or users of the institution, intervene negatively to transform what is given to them as "the truth" of the institution. Emerging during a crisis or conflict, the instituting therefore establishes a dynamic capable of creating new social relationships.*

***Institutional pedagogy**: implementation by the training collective does not only concern the explicit rules of the organisation (timetables, program) or the implicit rules, 'the class laws' (Vasquez and Oury), that is to say the way of interacting, budgetary questions, ideology, etc., but also the very possibility of transforming the class group or the school group into an instituting group in relation to the ever-widening institutional environments.*

It is essentially a permanent reflection on the conditions of appropriation of training (self-training) by forces made passive or reified ('instituted as such') in the school.

Back at the Normal School, Paulo tells some colleagues about his experiences in France, including Marta Lacour, whom he already knew from the youth nature association. They go along well together, and when Paulo isn't visiting his grandfather after school, he can often be found in her rooms. Marta has already confided in him she plans to work as a teacher for a short time, but that her intention is to study pedagogy afterward. Together they read *Towards an institutional pedagogy*. They bring up institutional pedagogy several times during class, much to the delight of their supervising teacher for pedagogy. They plan an internship with Fernand Oury.

At the beginning of their second year at Normal School, Marta and

Paulo read a monograph on early reading and writing in a cooperative class. They then travel to Brussels for a week-long internship in a French-speaking cooperative class, where they observe first-year students at work. The class begins the day by hearing who has news items. The teacher writes these down in one or two sentences. The class then choses one written news item to analyse together. Together, the children incorporate the words into existing word lists or start a new list. Each list has a common element: usually a syllable or a letter combination. The children are continually encouraged to incorporate other words they knew into the lists. The teacher emphasises the connection between reading, writing, and spelling. Therefore, she invites the children to write down their own news items, encouraging them to use the word lists to identify the spelling of certain syllables or sounds. When asked, "*how do I write this?*", she often answers by asking to consult the list that starts with this or that word.

On the train back to Ghent, Paulo suggests to Marta that they visit Grandfather Louis together. They enthusiastically tell him what they've seen. Louis recounts with Paulo and Marta the conversation he had with Paulo's parents about ten years ago about synthetic, analytical, and analytical-synthetic methods, and the then-recent *structural method*. Louis explains that the rise of that *structural method* was not so much to remedy the perceived shortcomings in analytic-synthetic methods, but primarily to address the global method, where there is a significant risk that teachers will not sufficiently stimulate children who stick to rote global sentences. In this method, standardised words are extracted from standardised sentences, which serve as examples for introducing a single letter or sound. Marta asks: "So such a standardised structure method is the poor relation of what we saw in the cooperative class in Brussels?" When Louis nods cautiously, Paulo observes: "And can't the Normal School adequately prepare future teachers to learn how to structure these new items that are more relevant to children? Maybe we

should invite Paulo Freire to the teacher training college, along with Fernand Oury!" Marta looks at him for a moment and then says, "That would be the work of the teacher of pedagogy every time he talks about the institutional nature of the class."
Shortly afterward, Marta and Paulo participate in the internship with Fernand Oury. They contribute only their experiences as teacher training students. They hear teachers share their experiences, and Oury encourages discussion groups to analyse those experiences. They know by now that such discussion groups lead to class monographs, as is the case with some of the texts in the book *From the cooperative class to institutional pedagogy*. By the end of the internship, some express a desire not only to continue working on their own monographs but also to translate that book in Dutch. John, Paulo, and Marta will work on this together with others over the next two years.

In Portugal the *Modern School Movement* acquires its own official character, after having been active as a foreign section of the French *Modern School Movement* in the last years before the Carnation Revolution. At the request of some of its members who work in a subsidiary school of *A Voz do Operário* the institution organises pedagogical internships with the help of the Portuguese modern school movement.
That period called by part of the population the revolutionary process under construction (Processo Revolucionário Em Curso) ends. Under the first governments led by the socialist Soares, the Portuguese people suffer greatly. The country feels the consequences of capital flight following the Carnation Revolution and decolonisation. Rising inflation leeds to the rationalisation of basic products. The government request intervention from the International Monetary Fund and is looking for a rapid integration into the European Community, joined by neighbouring Spain after the death of General Franco.

Maria Coelho begins her teacher training at the Normal School in Évora. She soon hears about the *Modern School Movement.* When Sérgio Niza, the undisputed leader of the movement, addresses the students, she is present in the audience. A connoisseur of both Freinet's and Oury's work, he discusses the institutional nature of the modern school movement model. When he speaks of the cooperative nature of the model, he refers also to Portuguese influences such as those of António Sérgio, who worked on the educational project from the early years of the Portuguese Republic, proposed by Minister Camoesas.

More than a year later, Paulo and Marta are visiting Oostende. Paulo divides his time between translating and typing, and short assignments at Ghent municipal schools. Marta has also completed a few short-term substitutes. She helps with translation and otherwise spends most of her time volunteering at a shelter for women victims of domestic violence. She observes how often, due to their financial dependence, women are subjected to prolonged periods of aggression, without being able to free themselves from their aggressor. When she discusses this with John, he speaks of the hypocrisy of the democratic capitalist state, in which the elite sporadically recognises rights but doesn't necessarily apply them. It is just as in Paris where the elite men were free to discuss in the in the Procope while only elite women could organize salons. We still live in a world that considers it normal for men to spend a large portion of their time at work and social events, while women financially dependent on a man live in seclusion. Jeanne says that financial aspects aren't the only factor. When women also work, the aggression is sometimes no less pronounced. Marta recalls some episodes she experienced with factory workers and nods. Industrial society seriously disrupts raising children together, for example. In any community, the support of grandparents, friends, and acquaintances was traditionally sought. This becomes difficult

when, due to economic circumstances, families live further apart, neighbours develop fewer and fewer ties, and friends and acquaintances, like everyone else, have little time due to increased workloads. Jeanne explains how even the proximity of grandparents and friends, when Paulo and Anne were young, wasn't enough to allow John and herself to share and independently dedicate the time they wanted to devote to social relationships. That's why they had a live-in caregiver until she started her own family, but not everyone can afford that. The fact that only such a paid live-in caregiver gives freedom of action to those who pay for it is a sign that the social model we have, is far from perfect Jeanne concludes.
Paulo and Marta are still in Oostende when they learn of the sudden death of Pope John Paul I elected only a month earlier. Two days later, John hears from one of his friends conspiracy theories are already circulating the Pope might not have died of natural causes. Rumours are that his easygoing approach wouldn't have been appreciated by the more conservative Vatican staff. John finds it all rather far-fetched. A month later, news breaks that the Polish Pope-elect Karol Wojtyła has taken the name John Paul II. A sign of the times for those same opponents? Or not?

In early 1979, Paulo decides to leave Ghent. Although the farewell is difficult, Marta and Paulo feel they had to go their separate ways. Marta begins her university studies, while Paulo can't resist the temptation to go to Leuven to work on a children's learning community established by parents, with the intention of turning it into a small-scale school project. Until recently, the community included many political refugees from Portugal and Spain, who found refuge in the various humanities faculties at the university. By now many returned to their native countries now that political circumstances permitted, but some decided to develop what they had begun here further, including some Portuguese friends of Gabriela Llansol and Augusto Joaquim. This international

group had initially idealised a kind of Illichian learning community in Namenstraat in Leuven, in a living space they had established for their children. Later, the group moved to a farm-bakery near Louvain-la-Neuve. Adults and children worked there together. The adults were not only responsible for the project's sustainability, including a professional bakery and vegetable nursery, but also for the children's education. In the late 1970s, scattered groups of parents, including those remaining from the community school, started this new learning community. Paulo agrees to pop in with a group of interested teachers to give the project an institutional character.

Around the same time, Jeanne reads Cecília Payne has died. From the short biography published by the newspaper, she learns that Payne eventually became a full entitled professor in the Harvard Faculty of Science and subsequently the first woman to have a department chair at Harvard, naturally in the Department of Astronomy. She sighs and tells John that, as far as recognition of women's scientific work is concerned, not much has happened since the time of Émilie du Châtelet. John believes this might change in the coming decades, as more and more female students enrol in a wide variety of scientific fields. He then gives Jeanne a copy of a recently published work by Douglas Hofstadter: *Gödel, Escher, Bach.* He is fascinated by the way Hofstadter connects mathematics, consciousness, the universe, and humor, using fictional dialogues between characters such as Achilles, the tortoise, Zenon, and Caroll. He immediately adds that he hopes Jeanne can help him understand the more mathematical aspects. Jeanne writes to Paulo about it. She knows he's a fan of Lewis Caroll's books. Paulo immediately starts looking for the book himself, but gives up halfway through, apologising that, unlike John, he doesn't have Jeanne at hand to help him understand the mathematical arguments. Moreover, reading the book in English is more difficult

than he thought. John laughingly replies that he should just keep the book until he retires and, in the meantime, make friends with someone who is well-versed in mathematics.

After finishing the translation of *From the cooperative class to institutional pedagogy* John continues to correspond with Fernand Oury. They briefly discuss the death of Jean Piaget. John assumes that Oury is either unfamiliar or poorly acquainted with Vygotsky's work, which has not yet been translated into French. Oury does, however, mention Lewin's studies on the behaviour of individuals in variously organized groups. His main goal is to demonstrate that aggression decreases in groups that develop and apply rules together. John knows from previous conversations that Fernand Oury likes to quote Lacan, mentioning in passing that the psychoanalyst once should have said he had never been as well understood as by the groups of *Institutional Pedagogy*… But maybe he said *Institutional Psychotherapy* thinks John with a smile.

Meanwhile, Paulo is busy and has little time for family visits. He is thrilled when his sister Anne visits to announce her pregnancy. The beautiful spring weather invites weekend walks in the nearby woods. Anne talks about her visits to their aunt, who works as a social worker in Brussels and is constantly in contact with immigrants from North Africa. She says she wants to work with female immigrants herself. Currently, she volunteers in several community centers in Ghent. She helps Turkish, Spanish, Italian, Moroccan, and Flemish women set up after-school childcare facilities, where they try to get the children to play together as much as possible, exchange game rules, and learn each other's language. Paulo asks if they have any contact with similar initiatives in other cities. He tells her that the children he mentors have started a correspondence with a class in Delft. Perhaps contacts with Amsterdam or Rotterdam would be interesting? According to his friends in Delft, many immigrants from Southern

Europe, but also from Suriname and Indonesia, live in those cities.
After the summer, Paulo works with a student from the Normal School, with whom he develops a close bond. He is delighted to see how easily his student colleague grasps the pedagogical basis of classroom relationships and how quickly he guides the group and subgroups in their work. In October, they take the children together to visit the Delft correspondents for a week. Both teachers are housed with their Dutch counterpart, while the children are placed in pairs with one of the correspondents in each pair. Halfway through their stay, they move on to the second correspondent. The meeting is a great success. Paulo is delighted to see again some of the teachers with whom he once interned with Fernand Oury.
Upon returning home, Paulo receives the news that Anne's son has been born and has been named Sebastiaan. Paulo invites her to spend Christmas with him and the baby. Amidst the many "baby moments", Anne shares her experiences with the community center work and how she's gradually discovered that bringing together children from sometimes very different backgrounds is easier if one can also gather the mothers around something. Until she had to interrupt her work just before Sebastiaan's birth, she regularly invited the mothers to prepare meals together, with the intention of giving everyone a taste of what the others are making. She is proud that at two of the community centers she works with, there is now a monthly Saturday meal where the fathers and children are also present, even during this period when she is unable to participate.
Shortly after Anne leaves for Ghent to return to her community center work. A few months later, Paulo visits one of the initiatives on a Saturday meal. He takes advantage of the opportunity to talk with the leading women's group about his class's correspondence with a class in Delft. He suggests that their community center could correspond with a similar initiative in Rotterdam. This happens just as Anne is moving to Oostende where she receives support from Jeanne who retires after nearly thirty years of teaching.

The Dutch pupils' return visit to the group still supervised by Paulo leads to an unexpected development. An international meeting of modern school movements is scheduled in Delft during the Easter holidays to prepare for the teacher meeting that will take place in Italy the following year. Paulo is asked if he would be willing to come to Delft for a few months. His language skills, primarily Spanish, would be very useful for the preparation and follow-up, as a fairly large delegation from Spanish-speaking countries is expected. Furthermore, the board of the corresponding school would like to discuss aspects of cooperative classroom organisation. They are interested in the recent experiences with the Belgian project. Paulo arranges the takeover of the group with his trainee and the Normal School supervisor and departs for Delft. During the train journey, he begins to read *Cosmos* by Carl Sagan. Not only is he immediately fascinated by the constant connections Sagan makes between mythology and the origins of science, he is also sensitive to Sagan's global approach by which *Cosmos* appears to him as an example of a cosmopolitan view of the development of humanity and its knowledge.

The months he spends in Delft are crucial for Paulo. The international encounter provides further inspiration. His earlier travels with his father or both parents, in France and various European countries, his disillusionment with the "socialist countries" after 1968, as well as the events in Chile and Portugal had already left their mark on his way of thinking. After what he learned with the parent community he feels compelled to embark on a new quest, this time in the world of schooling and schools. He is part of a local working group of teachers who primarily work in urban Freinet schools. He extends his stay in the Netherlands which will continue until the end of the school year. Meanwhile, he has more contacts and appointments: there's the young French city-teacher who invites him, there are the fascinating conversations

with the veteran Republican Josep Alcobé, which await continuation in Barcelona. He has also been invited to attend the MCEP congress in southern Spain in July. In Malaga, he meets the kindergarten teacher Ramona, who offers him lodging. During the conference, he meets Josep Alcobé for the second time, who invites him one more to Barcelona during a conversation about *Francisco Ferrer*. Paulo tells him about the ties his grandfather and his grandfather's mother had with Edward Peeters and through him with the LIEN. This time Paulo also talks about institutional pedagogy, which John sees as a form of actualisation of Freinet's model, and then Josep tells him that he had an interesting conversation in Delft with a Portuguese teacher about what the *Modern School Movement* is developing in Portugal. She herself is not present, but several Portuguese colleagues are. Paulo has a brief conversation with them. He is somewhat surprised to hear that they all know the institution *A Voz do Operário*. He explains that as a result of chance encounters between his father and grandfather, but also through his great-grandmother's notes about F*aria de Vasconcelos* he heard about that institution several times.

After the conference, Paulo and Ramona borrow a friend's car to visit several places in southern Spain. They meander through Ardales, Osuna, Écija, and Almódovar del Rio, all the way to Córdoba. They make several visits to the Mezquita. Paulo sees the building as an expression of the difference between faith and dogma. Throughout the centuries, people have found their temple there for living their faith. But instead of making it an example of experiencing pluralistic diversity, it is presented as a testament to how successive arrogant dogma-mongers attempted to erase previous dogmas. Moreover, the removal of 400 columns from the magnificent mosque to plant a Catholic cathedral in its midst is merely the latest step in a series of unfortunate decisions that distance people from each other instead of uniting them, he tells Ramona. She appreciates his reasoning and replies that the

emperor, born in the city where he studied and later ruled the vast Catholic empire, ordered the mosque to be converted into a cathedral. He was a Catholic fanatic, but that didn't stop him from pointing out that the architect had simply destroyed a work of art to replace it with a rather insignificant structure.
In mid-August, they return to Malaga, and Paulo flies to Brussels, arranging for Ramona to visit him over Christmas. He agrees to continue working on the development of the community center during the following school year, provided he can travel to Spain in late spring, from where he will continue on to Italy.

At the end of 1981 Belgium is facing yet another government crisis. The country is well on its way to splitting into two micro-states, if not legally, then at least in its daily operations. The only bright spot is the government that was eventually formed is considering ending the school freeze introduced a few years earlier. The Christian Democrat who takes over the Ministry of Education seems to want to give schools with specific learning models legal status. This made it much easier for Paulo to leave the "levensschool" (living school) project. During the Christmas holidays, Ramona joins him as agreed, and together they visit Antwerp, Ghent, Bruges, and Oostende. They also spent a day at the Zwin nature park, where Paulo reminisces about his years in the youth association for nature studies. They make vague plans. The following year, Paulo would move in with Ramona.
But they're not there yet. Two weeks before Easter, Paulo buys a used car. He spends almost every weekend with Anne, mainly to play with little Sebastiaan. At the end of June, on his way home, he visits Marta in Ghent. He tells her about his visit to Spain last year and that he wants to attend the MCEP conference in northern Spain again this year, after which he will travel on to the RIDEF conference in northern Italy. Ramona will accompany him. He asks Marta if she'd like to attend that conference as well.

At the beginning of July Paulo leaves for *Santilla del Mar*. He spends the night at a campsite near Tours, where he gets into conversation with a teacher who worked in the Paris suburbs for the entire past school year. He talks about his experience with the living school. When he talks about the internships about *Institutional Pedagogy* she looks up in surprise: “Did you do an internship with Fernand?” she asks. He nods. She then says her name is Françoise and that during this year in Paris she had regular meetings with Catherine Pochet, who had with Fernand Oury three years ago published *Who is the Council?*

“I only met Catherine once, after an internship with colleagues. If I remember correctly, they were analysing Catherine’s class diary together, trying to distill that book from it. I was a student at the time, and I remember she made a huge impression on me.”

Françoise laughs. “She still makes a huge impression. She has helped me a lot this year in my attempts to make something meaningful out of the classwork. I don’t know how it is in Belgium, but what Jacques Pain and Fernand bring together in *Chronique de l’École Caserne (Chronicle of the Barracks School)* isn't exactly invented! I sometimes suspect they’ve chosen only the least shocking testimonies, or the situation has gotten even worse in the last ten years.”

“I have little experience as a teacher in state schools,” Paulo replies. “I got involved quite quickly with that school I just told you about. But my grandfather closely followed the gradual development of public schools within the framework of compulsory schooling in Belgium, and he notes that projects that embody humanism, centred on dialogue between the child learner and the adult orienting them, are a marginal phenomenon. Whenever attempts are made to build more dialogical and experience-based curricula, there’s an immediate chorus of protest from those who prioritise traditions, rituals, and hierarchical power relations, not only in schools but also in society. My parents assume that secular and religious

schools, but also often private initiatives in those countries where they are permitted, are merely a means of educating the masses to mediocrity, while a small elite can continue to develop."

"So nothing changed since what we had here in France call *l'Ancient Regime*?"

"What is changing is that those who make a profession of educating children have, or can have, more and more information to know that the school installed by the elite actually continues to maintain the rituals that your La Salle once systematised. Many who have and want to hold on to power regularly express nostalgia for the *cheap* proposals of the English Lancaster. My grandfather says he saw interest in more humanism before the first great war of this century, but also during the interwar period, but only for one, at most two generations. Memories are cleverly erased or redirected toward more nationalistic interpretations of history, and local economic interests are the primary driving force in this."

"And so, those who are committed to general knowledge and dialogic learning based on individual and shared experiences remain on the margins…"

"I agree. Those who use models like Freinet, Oury, Decroly, Ferrer, and the Modern School Movements are being closely watched. Private schools for the bourgeoisie adapt these models into a kind of preceptor version, now supplemented with structured autonomous work. There's little room for cooperation and collective governance, and the focus is on collaborative individual guidance. Meritocracy is more important than interaction, and ranking and exclusion are more important than leveraging diversity and complementarity."

"Yes, if you put it that way, then it does indeed seem that the aim of the rulers of the modern state is to promote mass mediocrity."

"Certainly until the next major crisis. I find that a bit disturbing, don't you? It's a kind of perverse paraphrase of Socrates. The only thing we know for sure is that most of humanity doesn't know. A

necessity for the oppressor, to quote Paulo Freire in the broadest sense of the term. The consciousness-raising process of the oppressed is met with the unscrupulousness of the arrogant oppressor," Paulo concludes.
"You don't immediately paint a rosy picture," Françoise notes.
"Not for the next few decades, no. But I'm optimistic. Within two or three hundred years, we might have a good vaccine against the galloping infection of wild capitalism that threatens humanity."

The next day, Paulo drives on to Spain. Françoise accompanies him to Bayonne, from where she plans to hitchhike to Toulouse. They part ways, agreeing to stay in touch. At the MCEP congress, Paulo and Ramona reconnect. They participate in a workshop using Paulo Freire's working model. The goal is to better understand how awareness of the oppressor influences awareness of the oppressed. This includes discussing power dynamics in the classroom.
In the middle of the week they can both make an extraordinary visit to the beautiful *Altamira Cave* nearby. Since this year, a limited number of visitors are allowed again to visit the caves once inhabited or used by humans in the distant past. That evening, they discuss how to interpret the depictions of fauna and the connection between humans and animals. Is it about spiritual experience or about documenting rituals? This leads Paulo to Albert Jacquard, Paul Ricœur, and Paul Veyne. Looking back, he realises that this congress helped him learn to place things in their time and to be very careful in interacting with those who are included in a learning community, especially in the role of guide or facilitator.
After the congress, Ramona and Paulo continue through the Pyrenees. They travel through southern France, visiting Carcassonne. They spend the day in the medieval city and recall their visit to Cordoba last year. What they saw there testifies to a historically greater cultural diversity than is the case here. After a short visit to Nice, they drive towards Tende. They don't

particularly enjoy driving through the 3-kilometer-long, narrow tunnel. When the end appears, Paulo can't help but use the tunnel as a metaphor for the mind-crushing nature of compulsory school and its end as a hopeful ray of hope that, over time, the human spirit will not be forced to become shallow and mediocre.

They arrive in Turin early August. A series of misunderstandings prevents them from entering the heavily guarded and completely closed-off congress venue until three days after the start of the congress to find the event rather uninteresting. Ramona decides not to stay until the end of the congress and takes advantage of the offer of two friends from the Spanish delegation to ride with her to Barcelona. Paulo also bids farewell to the congress that same day and takes a couple from Florianópolis in southern Brazil with him to Belgium. During the return trip, they discuss living conditions in the state of Santa Catarina. Paulo quickly understands that both attend a private school that bears a Freinet label but is not open to everyone. Has the upper middle class, after the *New School*, now also co-opted and diluted the Modern School for the benefit of a certain intellectual elite? For Paulo, what the two Brazilians sketch might be a vision for the future of Flanders: schools with a Freinet technology patent instead of a liberating educational model in a structured learning environment that children and adults create themselves. He hopes it won't come to that.

Paulo's fellow travellers found accommodations in Bruges, so he drives them directly there. He takes advantage of the opportunity to visit Anne and Sebastiaan. Then he looks up Marta Lacour. She tells him she'd lost interest after seeing the program for the international congress. Enthusiastically, she tells him she'd reconnected with Fernand Oury and asked if he knows Claude Azuará. He currently trains teachers, both through internships and introductory training, and she'd like to exchange ideas with him. Paul is pleasantly surprised.

He's just back home when the father of one of his pupils from last

year contacts him. He tells Paulo that the family is splitting up and asks him if he'd be willing to pass him his apartment contract. The decision is quickly made: a phone call to the landlord arranges the lease transfer, and he quickly reaches an agreement with the transferee regarding the furnishings. Paulo only takes his books. He leaves them at Anne's and writes to Ramona that he's going to Malaga, but will arrive a little later than expected. He's taking Marta with him to Paris and will then work for a few months as a teaching assistant in Françoise's class, who has now a permanent position near Orange.

Marta, Paulo, Claude, and his wife Josseline are enjoying a well-prepared meal. When coffee is on the table, Marta looks at Claude and says, "If I understand correctly, Paulo, you swapped working with the children for training future teachers?"

"Josseline and I have come to the conclusion that we can work together: an institutional cooperative environment, both for the adolescents she continues to work with, and for future teachers, with whom I work."

He looks at her and Josseline continues: "Claude's students stage in my class. Every year, my students and his students develop a work plan under our supervision, and they also determine the rules together. This way, many of my students' projects can be supervised by one or more of Claude's students, and this can happen in either my work environment or his. The groups have separate class meetings based on their own class journals, but there's also a shared journal where all members of both groups can record what they think should be discussed by both groups together. This usually happens every two weeks."

"So it's not a classical agreement, like between a teacher training college and a training school?" asks Marta.

"No," Claude continues, "we see the collaboration between the two groups more as an extended learning community. My students know

that, as adults, they have a responsibility to guide Josseline's students, who know that it's their responsibility to guide my students in that task and therefore also to point out their mistakes. This error analysis is part of the agenda for the joint class meetings."

"That's very interesting," says Paulo, "not only Josseline's class but also Claude's can develop their own curriculum in this way, based on the needs of their own group and the extended group."

Later, when they are alone, Marta tells Paulo that she plans to stay with Claude and Josseline for about three months to see how they get their joint work plan underway and that she will also discuss *Institutional Pedagogy* with other people involved. She's thinking about applying for a position at a teacher training college closer to the living school Paulo helped set up, trying to set up a similar project. The next day, they say goodbye at the station where Paulo takes the train to Orange. He leaves the car to Marta.

In the last week of August, Paulo and Françoise make plans for his role as assistant teacher in Françoise's class. During a short visit to the school early that week, Paulo was pleased to discover the almost complete collection of instruments Carl Orff who had died in the spring, had in his *Orff-Schulwerk* project. In a well-sealed room are a soprano and an alto chime, three metallophones (soprano, alto, and bass), and three xylophones in the same configuration. He also finds timpani, bells, drums, bell drums, cymbals, and maracas. Paulo notes only a woodblock drum, triangles, and castanets are missing to provide the complete set of instruments. When Françoise expresses some surprise at his enthusiasm, Paulo explains that he had not only received thorough training at the teacher training college to work with children on this instruments, but that he had also witnessed firsthand the results of Pierre van Hauwe's work with primary schools in Delft. He immediately proposes to Françoise to take up the musical accompaniment for all the classroom projects. With this plan they go to the headmistress of the

school, who tells them that two wooden drums and some triangles are used by the teachers in different classes to ask for silence… The castanets are still in her own classroom because of a project on flamenco dancing last school year.

When Paulo takes the international bus to Malaga in the spring of 1983, pentatonic work with Orff instruments is a common occurrence in three classes. Françoise and two of her colleagues take over the children's musical education from him, intending to make it a school project.

Dear father,

I've arrived at my new temporary destination. It was wonderful to see Ramona again. Suddenly, I've gone from primary school to kindergarten. Tell Anne that one of the consequences is I miss Sebastiaan very much. Along with Ramona's team, I'm learning how to build cooperation with children aged four and five, sometimes even younger. You can hardly claim that the transition from egocentric to sociocentric stage happens at the same time for all children. It's nice to see how many of them quickly recognise their own names from the list in the classroom. No infantilising pictures or drawings are needed: Jorje isn't a tortoise, Maria isn't a bunny, Manolo isn't an elephant… They're just Jorje, Maria, and Manolo, happy to be themselves, and they have no trouble finding their name tag and placing it on the activity board next to what they plan to do, or next to what they've done during the play and work sessions they arrange themselves, alone or with a friend.

I'm already convinced that all teachers should spend some time in a kindergarten classroom to see and learn that the children who will later join their class already know lots of things. I suspect that one of the reasons why some children drop out in their first year of study is that they're simply bored when the teacher assigns them tasks they can already perform. Honestly, what I see done to children in some elementary school classrooms would make Vygotsky turn in his grave, and Piaget, Dewey, and a few others are probably doing the same.

How are your projects in the apprenticeship program going? Can we

already integrate more into the institution, or do the rigid rituals of the established institution continue to prevent things from moving forward?

A big kiss from Paulo

Dear Paulo,

Your mother and I are glad you're doing well and, as always, busy with projects. Although… what exactly are you doing? Spending time with Ramona in class? Visiting schools? Enjoying the sun?

You're asking about our work in apprenticeship training. Well, we finally have a system that works quite well, especially because our institution has, until now, fallen under the Ministry of Labour and not of Education, even since compulsory schooling was extended to 16 years of age. Although the law still stipulates compulsory schooling, you can sense that the state bureaucracy would prefer compulsory school attendance. For some time now, there have been heated debates about whether our work falls under Labour or Education. A silly thing to do, because in small business training, especially in micro-enterprises, the link between apprentice training and that of future self-employed entrepreneurs is very strong. The heralds of capitalism, who see every unemployed person as a kind of personal attack on their liberal thinking, a pariah to be ostracised or a good-for-nothing to be subjected to slave labour, have now "discovered" there is a correlation between educational attainment and unemployment. Of course, these are flexible concepts. Are your more than active sister and aunt, when they voluntarily help migrants or political refugees to learn the language and find their way around, unemployed by the Flemish-Belgian bureaucracy? Or do the new rulers of the modern nation-state find them too independent? In doing so, they threaten the conventional master-slave model, according to these rulers, the only narrative for the modern state: the narrative of their reality in their state with their will to decide over everyone else. I say this because it is now certain that next month the law will be passed that will extend compulsory schooling to 18, with the primary aim of getting young people off the streets and out of the

unemployment figures. You see: not compulsory education, but an institutionalised obligation. And that institution must, of course, fall under the jurisdiction of Education. I think that future generations, yours or your children's, if you ever have any, will suddenly see the need to make arrangements for unruly young people in secondary education. And their failures, resulting from their behaviour, will then again be their own fault, possibly also that of their families, of course. Perhaps Institutional Pedagogy will one day penetrate secondary education; who knows, perhaps Institutional Anthropogogy will experience a resurgence…

But I don't want to be too negative, son. We've always worked on the margins, and we will continue to do so. Perhaps we sometimes do some useful work.

Do you have any idea if you'll be coming to Belgium, for example, during the summer? Or is that not in your plans?

A big kiss from your mother and me.

Dear parents,

What exactly do I do? I have a part-time job as a music teacher at the kindergarten. I also do some translating for local small businesses, primarily in the tourism sector. And I read a lot. It's a wonderful life.

You've probably noticed by now… we don't have any plans to come to Belgium at the moment. We were asked if we'd be interested in joining the MCEP delegation at an international meeting of FIMEM in Cologne, but, honestly, we've had enough of those kinds of gatherings at the moment. We did attend the local congress, where I met Josep Alcobé again. He gave us pause, though, because he's gone to Cologne now that he's on the FIMEM board. But ultimately, we'll stay here. Perhaps with a visit to Gibraltar, perhaps with a trip across the border to neighbouring Portugal. There were Portuguese at the congress here again, and they invited us to visit our neighbours again.

A big kiss from your son.

In neighbouring Portugal Maria Coelho started working this year

in a small semi-private school where she was included in a team of teachers who are all members of the *Modern School Movement.* She becomes very friendly with the person who usually represents the group at international meetings. When that friend hears that the FIMEM meeting was not far from where Maria's parents live, she suggests Maria accompany her. So she eventually integrates into the Portuguese delegation. The meetings themselves don't mean much to her, but she learns that the international meeting will be held the following year in Belgium, also not far from her parents, so she immediately makes plans to attend. This way she can combine attending the congress with a visit to her parents.
Meanwhile, she meets several representatives of national modern school movements. After the meeting, she and her Portuguese friend, along with two Austrian teachers visit Aachen and the border region with Belgium and the Netherlands, before returning to Portugal with her parents.

Dear ones.

Here, along with the local peace committees we're following what's happening in NATO member country Belgium. The military authorities apparently want to install their new and dangerous nuclear-powered toys on Belgian soil. Of course, superpower Belgium must be a key strategic target for those dangerous Soviet Union leaders… I don't know if you've heard that joke where a villain from the East says he can be at the North Sea with his tanks in 24 hours, to which a pathetic bureaucrat from the West replies: "Only if we turn all the traffic lights green."

We've heard here there's quite a bit of protest going on against these installation requests, which aren't necessarily the wishes of the population. Are local associations planning to mobilise? We don't hear much about that here.

Big kiss, Paulo.

Dear son,

Numerous associations in the Flemish part of Belgium are supporting a

platform called the Flemish Action Committee Against Nuclear Weapons. Work is underway to mobilise for a peace demonstration. It's a logical response to the way the national government autocratically decided to approve the installation of American nuclear weapons on Belgian soil without consulting parliament. The march will likely take place in the second half of October. Don't want to come over?

Paulo suggests Ramona to travel to Belgium. He has little to do at the moment and Ramona has been given a sabbatical year as she has enrolled at the local college for a *master*. October is also a quiet month for her. After consulting her supervisor, she is able to take two weeks off. They arrive in Oostende on the eve of Paulo's birthday, intending to stay there with the family to participate in the peace march on October 23rd.

The turnout for that manifestation exceeds all expectations. There are reports of between 400,000 and half a million participants, and the police agree with the organizers that it is the largest demonstration ever held on Belgian soil. In the end, Paulo and Ramona remain in Brussels for Melanie's concert, after which Paulo includes *Look what they've done to my song* in his favourite list.

The next day, John and Paulo discuss the march. John thinks that with such a clear protest, the government will inevitably have to respond. Paulo is less optimistic. He seems to be right. The weapons are and will remain at Kleine-Brogel and in Florennes. Five years later, he must agree with John, although he doubts whether the removal of the weapons is actually related to the ongoing peace marches or rather to the hope of Western capitalists that the changing political situation in Germany and the Soviet Union will open up new markets. Perhaps, for a while, new hordes of consumers will bring in money faster than the maintenance of the military apparatus in parts of Europe.

1984… the year of George Orwell's utopian thriller.

In the spring, Ramona and Paulo part ways peacefully. Paulo

moves to Granada and moves in with a mutual friend who is the headmaster of a nursery school. He receives a three-month assignment as a music teacher. He spent most of his free time in the gardens of the Alhambra, where he has a three-month permanent entrance pass. A request comes from Belgium friends to help organize another international teachers' conference, primarily with logistical support for translation work. He promised to move in with Anne at the end of June and help prepare for the conference from there. Anne writes to him that Sebastiaan is already very happy to know that his uncle will be staying with them for a while.

Alberto Campos, later the partner of Catherine Demeester, is born in Lisbon.

In Angola, Daniel N'Kondo, later Joana Demeester's partner, is born.

Michel Foucault dies in Paris at the age of 57. On his return to Belgium, Paulo reads Surveiller et Punir (Discipline and Punish), which deeply impresses him. Foucault's analysis of the school would serve as a lasting guideline, with Paulo considering the models of Fernand Oury, Ivan Illich, and Paulo Freire as an oppositional framework.

Louis Demeester dies in Ghent. Paulo and John, along with Hans, clear out the house, setting aside many of Louis' documents and books, which later ended up in Paulo's library.

The early years of the Demeester sisters

(1985 - 2001)

Paulo feels a bit strange being back in Belgium. He's happy to be living with his sister and nephew for a while, but he misses the often boisterous discussions with his comrades from the MCEP. Anne tells him that Marta works closely with the small team at the living school. Apparently, she's managed to put her educational project, inspired by Claude and Josseline, into practice. Meanwhile, Anne talks about her adventures with non-Dutch speakers who want to learn Dutch and with the literacy groups for Flemish illiterates or functionally illiterate people. Despite compulsory schooling, which means school attendance for the majority of the population, three out of twenty Belgian adults are still unable to read or write. Anne, along with a retired teacher, supervises some of these groups.

"It's quite simple," she explains. "We started with two small groups of people who came to visit us themselves."

"How?" asks Paulo.

"Actually, it was because of my work with non-Dutch speakers. One day, someone came to my house and simply asked if I'd be willing to teach someone who speaks Dutch to read and write. When I said I'd give it a try, I quickly received 10 requests, all from the neighbourhood. So I asked Edward, a retired teacher, if he wanted to help. We started with simple texts that we wrote down ourselves based on what the people in the group said."

Paulo smiles. "That sounds familiar!"

"Is it not," Anne answers. "And it went like a charm. A year later, everyone in the group could read quite fluently, and those who were especially interested in learning to write were very pleased with the results. Meanwhile, we received even more requests. We suggested our students to volunteer with four or five people. They

knew how we worked and knew from experience the difficulties they'd encountered during the learning process. Edward and I meet with all the supervisors once a week and discuss their group's progress."

"That sounds like an interesting approach!" Paulo enthuses.

"It's working quite well," says Anne. "There are currently 15 groups involved. Edward supervises eight of the leaders, and I supervise seven. We're in contact with other volunteers in Flanders who are following the same path."

"Beautiful," Paulo appreciates.

Ann responds: "It's really just a bureaucratic problem. There's no recognition for those who learned to read and write this way. We've already looked for a way to get certified, but… there's no real framework. You can only get a certificate if you've been trained or examined by professionals, and many professionals see volunteers as unfair competition. They don't even want to test the participants in the reading and writing groups."

"Again!" Paulo observes. "Not a smooth organisation of people helping each other that meets learning needs, but rather a professional, hierarchical structure that claims to offer equal opportunities for everyone, but 'unfortunately' also produces dropouts. Uniform structures use statistical data to focus on the average student. The Gaussian curve as a starting point can only have the Gaussian curve as an end point. Stunning, massive mediocrity!"

Anne and Paulo decide to start several internship groups based on Anne's experience with the reading and writing groups to get professionals interested in this way of working. They wonder if there couldn't be a minimal framework, where the supervisors of the responsible staff with pedagogical qualifications could take on the certification task. They try to interest members of the international modern school movement, with little success.

After the international meeting of modern school movements, Paulo and Maria Coelho cross paths during such an internship. Maria visits her parents, and she meets some of her contacts from the last international meeting. She signs up for an internship with Anne and Paulo and shares her experiences on child and adult literacy in the context of awareness-raising processes.

During the following internship days, Paulo and Maria spend their free time together talking about their teaching experiences, Belgian history, and the Carnation Revolution. Maria explains to Paulo that Portugal hasn't had a proper basic law for education since the Carnation Revolution, and that they're currently working on their third provisional curriculum.

It's no complete surprise to Anne that Maria extends her stay in Belgium by a few days at the coast. The day before her departure, Paulo and Maria tell Anne of their intention to move in together.

But living together is easier said than done. Maria isn't interested in Paulo's semi-clandestine solutions, such as tourist accommodations or short-term specific work assignments. After considerable bureaucratic confusion they manage to obtain a temporary residence permit in Belgium for Maria at the end of the year and they move in with Anne for the time being. A few months later, they marry to ensure a legal footing as a couple both in Belgium and Portugal. During a visit to the shopping streets of Oostende, Paulo is surprised to see Corman announces its closure with a complete sale. Paulo and Maria just had a conversation with the managing director of a local association that runs various projects with immigrants and refugees and who, along with Anne, is trying to support local literacy groups to overcome the bureaucratic impasse surrounding recognition. They are offered a contract with a probable duration of two years which allow them to rent a small apartment.

In June, Maria announces her pregnancy. She convinces Paulo to move south. Paulo and Maria spent the summer in Portugal,

impulsively signing a contract to purchase an apartment unexpectedly offered to them. Catherine is born on December 20th. The following spring, Maria and Paulo ask to end their employment contract earlier than planned. Baby Catherine is doing well, the purchase of the house in Portugal is fixed, and so they decided to embark on their journey in an old van they bought for the occasion and refurbished sufficiently to move their few belongings, mainly books and baby items.

Anne Demeester is now twenty-six and, on Paulo's advice, has taken a course at the university. The state bureaucracy now has recognised credentials allowing her to convert her volunteer work into professional work with migrants and non-Dutch-speaking people. Suddenly, she has more time now she can make her volunteer work her main occupation. When she writes about this to Paulo, he imagines a world in which people shouldn't have to waste time on uninteresting work simply for economic reasons. Is a society possible where everyone can focus solely on and delve into their own interests? Will the further automation and robotisation of dangerous and/or dirty routine work finally make this possible? Or will the rich repeatedly use false arguments, constantly getting richer at the expense of the poor, whom this automation doesn't benefit, but paradoxically pushes back into a kind of slave condition? How explosive will the world become in the next century? Or will we see an era in which knowledge overtakes ignorance, despite the obstacles of those who hold and wish to retain power?

Once Paulo and Maria are settled into their new environment, they visit teachers at public, semi-private, and private schools. By the start of the school year, they have a good idea of what to do. Maria accepts a job offer on a school project that prioritises learner participation. She will continue working there until Catherine can start primary school at the same school, which is now a semi-state

school.
Paulo is starting the process of working as a certified teacher in Portugal. In the meantime, he organises courses and internships for those interested in the *institutional pedagogy*. Two years later, he is working in a slum near Lisbon. Together with the young people who live there, he develops projects primarily related to childcare and knowledge dissemination, where the combination of experience, diverse cultural backgrounds, and science plays a key role.

That same year, a long-time friend, who had been an executive at the Cultural Council for about ten years invites John to rejoin the body's executive board. He declines with some diplomacy, arguing that others are available as he feels a shift is noticeable in the prevailing climate of neoliberal pseudo-freedom.
About a year later, John admits in a letter to Paulo his optimism was exaggerated. Consultative bodies in local government are increasingly becoming mere alibis for many local party representatives with neoliberal agendas. It's not at all about participation, let alone cooperation. Only some collaboration is tolerated to ratify financial allocation keys for everything and anything. For many small-scale initiatives, important to those who set them up, there are suddenly no more operating costs. John fears that this kind of scaled-down cultural work will cause a segment of the population seeing their leisure activities undermined, only to build up a more aggressive relation with parties and decision-makers. The institutional deafness of individualistic city administrators threatens to do even more harm to democracy and pluralistic society than authoritarian teachers in schools… Both phenomena together threaten to turn every neighbourhood, every district, every city into a social powder keg sooner or later, he concludes.
Paulo responds that he and Maria believe they still see a very active

community life in Portugal and that the many small associations and communities are adequately supported by local governments. According to them, there are other reasons for concern, related to increasing consumerism and excessive individualism. Both observe what they describe as increasing decay and mediocrity in academia, tainted by economic regulations that have little to do with freedom of inquiry. They also note the growing disconnect between the human world, with its small daily activities, and the virtual world of institutions whose officials seem robotised.

The *banking model of education* Freire speaks of is ubiquitous and constantly threatens to penetrate even those schools where teachers rely on dialogical learning. On the one hand, insufficient attention seems to be paid to this in basic training at many Normal Schools and universities; on the other hand, there are central guidelines that lead to normalisation. This normalising standardisation has an erosive effect, levelling differences to the point of mediocrity. And the framework law for education has still not been voted on, although it will likely not prevent the proliferation of the bank model. Framework laws do not address pedagogy…

In January, Paulo and Maria have their second daughter, Joana. When John learns of the name choice, he notes that, as far back as he can trace, that name has appeared every two generations since the early 1800s. Four times in eight generations.

Shortly after Joana's birth, Paulo's parents stay with them for a few weeks. John spends a lot of time admiring his granddaughters. He tells Paulo that the notes he is collecting in notebooks are becoming cluttered and that he is thinking about buying a computer to neatly store everything digitally. He'd like his grandchildren to be able to form a picture not only of their grandparents' and parents' childhoods, but also of what life was like in general. Maria doubts whether that's possible. She says that John can paint a picture of his own childhood and Paulo's, but finds it difficult to paint a picture of

her parents' life and her childhood. To give just one small example: when she was in the village primary school, she did her homework by the light of a kerosene lamp. The houses had no electrical wiring. Only two years ago did the village get running water and a sewer system, which doesn't mean all the houses have running water. Paulo, on the other hand, has always taken a hot bath in a well-lit bathroom since he was a baby.

John is effectively continually impressed by how his daughter-in-law's childhood stories resonate so much more with his own than with his son's. And even he has always known electricity in his home. He sees in these stories of Maria and Paulo, but also of himself and Maria's parents, proof that, from a scientific perspective, history is best approached phenomenologically.

"Not just a phenomenological approach, but a universal one as well," says Paulo. "The way history is presented in schoolbooks, in my opinion, prevents children from developing a more complex worldview. History in national curricula is almost always a local version of events, and even then almost exclusively from the perspective of the victors. Not long ago, I saw nine-year-old children in a Portuguese classroom look surprised when I said that voyages of discovery didn't only occur in the 15th and 16th centuries, and that they weren't only made by Portuguese navigators. They looked even more surprised when I brought them some texts about the Viking voyages, which reached Portugal. It became completely crazy when we discussed the voyages of discovery by *Homo Sapiens* during the first great migration from the African continent, even before written history existed, and of which palaeontologists have been giving us increasingly refined versions over the past two hundred years as they have become better at interpreting their discoveries. Furthermore, look at the falsification of history when it comes to culture. A scale that represents the degree of primitiveness or cultural development doesn't, of course, mean anything in itself. It becomes completely ridiculous when the

person who represents the level of development thereby presents one's own condition as the most culturally developed. Rulers and intellectuals of all Indo-European empires suffer from this affliction. Immigrants are a-cultural culprits, but when one's own people emigrate (and are therefore immigrants elsewhere), it is to bring culture and prosperity. In more recent history, the slaves know all about it…"

"The problem is twofold," says John. "Can you replace the national histories of nation-states, each with its own canon, with a universal history? And who, in the human world consisting of diverse communities brought together in nations by whom throughout history claimed to have dominion over those communities? Who, I say, is today acquiring power in those nation-states themselves, is such a person interested in a universal history?"

"I wonder how history will be told to our daughters in twenty years," Maria notes. "With what's happening globally right now, it will certainly be told differently than what was told to you and later to us. Barely a good half-century ago, in our local history, Russia was the ally and the German nation the enemy; then the Soviet Union became the enemy. After that, the Soviet Union was once again an ally against Germany, at least for you; for us, that wasn't so clear. And then all the Western countries became good allies against the dangerous influences of what are called the Eastern Bloc Countries. And now it looks like when our daughters finish compulsory school, all those countries will be allies, against whom? African countries? China? Brazil?…"

"And to make matters even more difficult," Paulo continues, "even recent local heroes suddenly become enemies, as those in power want to preserve their own glory for posterity. Roles are rewritten as in a Brazilian *telenovela.* In Portugal we see very clearly, year after year, how the historical narrative has been adjusted since the establishment of the republic in 1910. Not to mention the dispute over who played the leading role in making Portugal democratic

during the last twenty-five years, with and after the Carnation Revolution. There's also no agreement on the concept of democracy itself. The only thing one can say is that all the speakers in the gallery are far removed from Dewey's interpretation of it. It is about a political arrangement and not about an ethical ideal based on participation instead of representation. Moreover, Dewey added in time, the harmony between the scientific method and democracy is essential.
John then adds: "Not to reduce participation into a ritualistic representation by organising party elections based on demagogic and empty speeches is, of course, an ongoing challenge. How do we find the balance between the necessary institutions and the anchoring instituting rules required in an institution, a community, let alone a society?"
Paulo responds: "I read a lot about various critical movements in the field of education and upbringing, and even in this area alone, it seems to me that the taken positions are based on a very dichotomous analysis. Can a process of dialogue develop from this, or will conspiracy theories immediately emerge?"

At the end of the year, John reflects on Maria's remark about the approach to history. With the fall of the Berlin Wall, numerous stories emerge that turn his imaginary letter to the Czechoslovak president into a purely romantic epistle. How does one induce people to adopt pluralistic, non-aggressive attitudes toward each other? Simply imposing them is impossible, that much is clear. It is not even desirable. Arrogant or threatening leadership does not result in a harmonious society. In a hierarchical state based on individual or corporate profit, that harmonious society means nothing more than forcing the subjected to accept their subjection; that was already clear to John. But apparently, much is going wrong with the practical application of the ethical ideals of cooperation, mutualism, democracy, and the common good that the

Socialist International seemed to champion. Whenever freedom is discussed, whoever is in charge seems to interpret own freedom as the absolute permission to make binding decisions on behalf of everyone else, even if this endangers the freedom and well-being of those others.
John wonders whether the leaders of the socialist countries are themselves responsible for their failures through their behaviour, or whether there was external fomenting. Jeanne believes that outsiders may have lent a hand: “Not with the intention of incorporating socialist ideology, but rather to destroy it. As an opponent, it’s difficult to endorse replacing what you consider a bad dogma with what its founders originally considered a good option, because then you’re back to square one. Neither Pope Wojtyła who cleverly stirred things up using his position in the church, nor the leaders of countries in the European Community or the United States, ever intended to guide the communities in those countries toward greater knowledge, greater insight, and greater participation, replacing arrogant or self-righteous leaders with dialogue-oriented leaders. They don’t even want that at home, and they would be foolish to replace what they consider one form of threat with another. The capitalist economic dogma of eternal growth and the promise of general prosperity seems to clearly triumph over the church-driven dogma with its official promise of loving your neighbour as yourself,” Jeanne concludes.

In 1991, Catherine attends the first grade of primary school at the school Maria worked on. There, she had the opportunity to organize the content of the work with her colleagues and the teacher. She experiments with the LOGO programming language for children, developed in Massachusetts by some of Seymour Papert’s researchers. Among Western European Ministries of Education, Portugal is in some ways a pioneer with computers in schools. Paulo is interested. He had already read extensively about

experimental work with basic mathematical concepts and corresponded with his mother about a psychological and didactic theory that Gérard Vergnaud presents with the theory of conceptual fields. According to him, learning occurs through problem-solving in situations. Constantly setting up new situations encourages the individual to mobilise concepts, enrich them, and adapt them based on the outcome of the problem-solving. Each concept is part of a conceptual field that contains an implicit element that, once revealed, can guide a teaching intervention. When analysing the conceptual field of addition, Paulo sees how the Cuisenaire rods can be a great help for children. For example, they can easily be used to tackle problems where the result is known and the unknown factor is one of the elements of the sum. He sees in the situations the children create themselves and present to the LOGO turtle an interesting extension of problem formulations that encourage the children to program the turtle's actions, ultimately resulting in concept enrichment.

Paulo and Maria aren't well-off and that's especially noticeable when they travel outside Portugal. Nevertheless, they organize a trip every year to spend a few days camping with their children through Spain and France, heading towards Belgium. They map out different routes giving the trips a somewhat experimental feel. They stop along the way and gain in-the-moment experiences through outside cave or castle visits, nature walks, or simply during the moments when the children are playing on a playground with someone who speaks a different language, and there are almost always quick attempts to get closer to explore some play equipment together.

The trips invariably end at Paulo's parents in Oostende and Maria's parents in northwest Germany. This leads Catherine, and soon Joana as well, to ask questions about the differences they observe when they visit their grandparents' homes. Paulo and Maria use this

to share their experiences. With Paulo, the girls play with toys from when Paulo and Anne were children, while with Maria, they learn to make dollhouses with flowers and plants from the fields. With a little imagination, sticks and stems become the anthropomorphic inhabitants of the makeshift dwellings.
The Demeester sisters spent their entire childhood in a diverse environment. They regularly visit Maria's birthplace in inland Portugal with their parents. In Lisbon, they accompany their parents and grandparents to performances, children's plays, and an occasional exhibition.

When Daniel N'Kondo finishes primary school at the age of ten, he is confronted with a problem that still persists in many places in Portugal. From the fifth grade onwards, pupils have subject teachers. There is still a shortage of teachers for many matters and those who are available and accustomed to ex-cathedra lessons are reluctant to work with young children who are often restless. A hybrid form, dating back to before the Carnation Revolution, was is solution: the *Tele-school.* The children sit together in a classroom under the watchful eye of a teacher and follow lessons on a regular television screen. Before 1974 lessons were broadcast in the morning on the National Television Channel, after which the children were asked to comment on what they saw by completing tasks under the teacher's guidance. The *Tele-school* classroom has been modernised. The regular television still stands in front of the classroom but is now equipped with a VHS cassette player. The pre-recorded programs contain the lessons of the subject teachers. The teacher in charge can now spread lessons throughout the day and present the assignments immediately after class.
Daniel is part of a class of 25 children in a spacious ground-floor apartment building that has been improvised into a school. There are two "classrooms" and a "teacher's lounge". There's no playground, but only the children mind. The school has four classes,

divided into two day shifts. Daniel is on the morning shift, from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m., which, according to those in the know, eliminates the need for a half-hour recess. In his class, those sitting at the back can barely see the television screen. The teacher in charge is the same one he had in regular primary school and he already fears hitting and pinching will simply continue. But apparently, the teacher no longer has time to walk around the classroom waving a stick. Every day, she struggles to turn on the VHS player, which often results in only half-time or no lessons at all. All of this happens in utter chaos, with everyone chattering away. After two months, the teacher realises she'll never be able to finish the curriculum, with or without VHS. So she decides to put the devices away, which will at least reduce the confusion. Daniel now has a series of lessons every day, part of which is taken up by copying the lesson content from the unseen VHS tapes from the blackboard. Then the teacher disappears into the “teachers’ lounge” for the last part of the morning. Through the half-open door, Daniel sees her spending her time chatting and smoking with her colleague from the other class. He refers to that time as the chaos time. Usually, the chaos extends a bit further. On the way to after-school care or home, the street invites all kinds of non-standard activities. Many years later, Daniel tells Paulo about this: “No, I think I’ll just had one real *tele-school*: Sesame Street…”

Since the Carnation Revolution, successive governments have addressed the problem of a shortage of school buildings and teachers for certain subjects. The Ministry of Education regularly extends compulsory education to catch up with Northern Europe, and the expansion of the school system has not kept pace. The system of morning and afternoon shifts, especially in larger cities, is well-established and supplemented by numerous micro-enterprises providing paid after-school care.

Furthermore, even the more conservative governments are aware that something needs to be done about the pedagogical insights of

teachers. But this leads to new difficulties. Normal Schools are being replaced by Superior Pedagogical Colleges, which are very creative in their basic training. For example, someone can specialise as a physical education teacher for the second cycle, that is, for the fifth and sixth years of study, yet still be employed as a first-grade teacher, without any real training in approaching reading, writing or basic arithmetic.

Amidst all the experimentation with successful and less successful solutions, Maria accepts an assignment at a Superior Pedagogical College to mentor aspiring teachers. She meets Paulo's girlfriend, Marta, during one of their holiday trips. Both now have a very active correspondence, with Marta talking about her working together with the teachers at the school. Maria systematically seeks out teachers willing to cooperate with her and the aspiring teachers, which in turn leads her to closer ties with the *Modern School Movement.*

Paulo still works as a supervisor for adolescents and adults in a neighbourhood project. He is involved in organising an after-school care facility when he happens to learn that the school of the *Kinderdorf Pestalozzi* was closed this year and that the children from the *kinderdorf* are enrolled in the nearby village schools. The focus there continues to be on intercultural communication and education. He wonders if he can return to teaching while maintaining ties to the community. When, shortly thereafter, the family has the opportunity to move into a larger house near the slum where Paulo works, his decision is made. As soon as a position becomes available, he wants to start teaching at the neighbourhood school.

In mid-1994, John sends a letter to Paulo and Maria in which he addressed what he saw as the considerable confusion within the military hierarchies of the NATO countries following the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact a few years earlier. He writes, among other

things:

I remember our conversation last summer about your visit to our friends in Czechoslovakia after the upheavals caused by the disappearance of the Soviet Union. Apparently, people quickly forgot that NATO was founded as a kind of deterrent to the Soviet Union shortly after the war, and that the Warsaw Pact was a kind of response to this. I can imagine how, in the meantime, there was a flurry of activity to find arguments to give the military-industrial complex, which generates a great deal of money for some, money that comes primarily from public taxes, a new raison d'être. I happened to read what Jonathan Eyal, director of the London-based Royal United Services Institute for Defence Studie*s wrote about a bizarre institution with the name* Partnership for Peace *and was just founded in Brussels. Eyal writes: 'Is* Partnership for Peace *the smokescreen behind which we managed to conceal the internal political disagreements of an alliance that threatened to become insignificant? Sooner or later, the US Congress would question the purpose of a military alliance against an enemy that no longer exists.*

Something had to be found. That partnership could perhaps serve to find new enemies; I'd say, if not on the planet, then outside it, why not? As long as military waste can continue… in my humble opinion, some of those military defenders are, by the way, the most dangerous threat to world peace today. They will, of course, continue to fuel regional conflicts. Just look at their goals and read between the lines:

- *developing military cooperative relations with NATO;*
- *acquire, in the long term, armed forces better able to cooperate with those of the members of the North Atlantic Alliance;*
- *develop, together with other States adhering to this Document, a planning and evaluation process that will be used to identify and evaluate the forces and resources that those other States could make available for training activities, exercises and multinational operations conducted in conjunction with Allied forces.*

I fear, dear children, that weapons will remain in the world for a long

time to come and that new waves of lust for possessions and power will continue to divide the world into rich and poor. But I also fear that the rich will become increasingly richer, and the poor increasingly poorer. Unfortunately.

Yet we must remain optimistic. Who knows what our grandchildren will achieve,

A big kiss to all four of you.

Gradually, the old primary schools in Portugal are being fitted with new classrooms. In the rapidly growing suburbs of Lisbon and Porto, several modernly equipped schools are being built, naturally attracting considerable political attention. Much of this is being financed with European funds. But the European Commission has other plans. In 1995, it published the White Paper *Teaching and Learning: Towards a Cognitive Society*. John reports it to Paulo and Maria, who were meanwhile going through the Portuguese version. John points out that whoever has power and money reinterprets *cognitive society* in a strictly economic sense and does not set universal access to all knowledge as the primary goal. One needs only to review the structure of the text to understand that the intended inclusion has a strong economic slant. Unemployment must be replaced by paid employment. There are at-risk groups, and special training must be provided for them. Under the first goal, described as *encourage the acquisition of new knowledge*, policymakers must consider both the *recognition of skills* whereby *mobility* is seen in the context of business activities and needs. The development of the *educational multimedia software* makes education more of a technocratic training than a dialogic personal development. The second objective is self-evident, John continues. It's about *Bringing schools and businesses closer together*, and that means for the student system "*to offer young people throughout the Union and in the most diverse professions more opportunities, more or less in the spirit of the journeyman system*" Could it be more cynical?"

John thinks. After taking over apprenticeship training and turning it into a tasteless product, they're now promoting the journeyman system again. Not to train young people to master their craft, but to put them to work in micro-enterprises for low wages. Other businesses won't be forgotten: internships in large companies will become possible. This way, taxpayer money will flow not only to private schools but also to private businesses. *Vocational training* will primarily serve to provide cheap transnational workers who can work in call centers, for example. Through outsourcing, any company can thus move its customer service or accounting functions to a low-wage country. And then there's the third objective: *combat exclusion.* This is done through second-chance education. This entire passage is an excuse for not allocating resources to sound primary education, but to short-term educational structures in "disadvantaged areas". This is necessary because, as the white paper states: *Although school is a 'first chance' for every individual to integrate into society, it is unfortunately true that this is not the case for the most disadvantaged population groups, who often can no longer rely on family or social structures for a general education at school.* Of course, the inefficiency of the "first chance" school is the fault of the poor, not of the school itself. This isn't a transitional situation while teacher training and schools adapt to the real lives of the local population. No, those who couldn't adapt to mass education based on averages are now being given a stopgap measure. And if that doesn't work either? No worries. Volunteer work is being subjected to economic rules. Young people without qualifications are being sent out to integrate into the labour market through volunteer work: *The European Union has also contributed to this to a modest extent, and so far only on an experimental basis, through the "Youth for Europe" programme. Furthermore, the Youthstart programme can finance actions within the framework of vocational training to support the integration of young people without qualifications,* is stated in the text.

The construction of the cognitive society in this text, therefore, does not envision a social model for the development of a pluralistic society, but an economic model that allows the owning class to further refine its power over the non-owning wage-earning class. It is a pervasive neoliberal model in which the rich are rich, the poor are poor, and the middle class is gradually threatened with extinction, John observes.

Paulo responds to John's sometimes emotional argumentation with a letter in which he explains he happened to meet the Portuguese scientist Jorge Du Port who moved to Brussels at a young age to conduct scientific work:

Jorge explained to me that he did this on his own initiative, as soon as he realised that, in the Portugal of his youth, academic work was reserved only for the gifted or the children of the gifted. He calls it a feudal system, which he says still governs Portuguese academia, and worse: other aspects of society are again subject to it to a greater or lesser extent. While part of Europe experienced a new period of a certain enlightenment after the Second World War, he jokes, Portugal has remained in the dark. You could say that the academic world here has skipped a swing. Portugal is therefore a kind of deviation from a general pattern, at least in recent history, Jorge told me. More generally, he observes that those who, even outside of Portugal, put forward new hypotheses are often shot down with the truths of the past, instead of being encouraged with grants to prove the hypothesis or abandon it in the absence of conclusive evidence. Quite a few academic authorities behave just like church authorities when scientists want to work on flawed or incorrect positions, by dogmatically clinging to those errors as a form of pure power play. Jorge believes that too many high-ranking academics haven't read, don't understand, or don't want to understand Popper when he says that the scientist looks for the errors in his hypothesis, while the dogmatist imposes his hypothesis as unshakeable truth.

That perhaps explains why I find so few academics in the humanities who propose radically new hypotheses. Those high up on the hierarchy, and therefore in the spotlight, are politically very vulnerable. Few professors dare to demonstrate that certain economic, educational, historical, or sociological working hypotheses have become dogmas, or are willing to support young people in seriously and scientifically substantiating strongly divergent hypotheses if there is evidence to support them. Even the clear signs that community policing, street workers, and dialogue-oriented schools significantly reduce tensions in ghetto neighbourhoods are dismissed with laughter and pity as fairy tales by those in power who channel public money into projects more in line with the capitalist market economy.

Shortly after Paulo's letter, his grandmother Charlotte dies. In the spring of 1996, he is at his parents' house helping Jeanne to clear out the rental house where Charlotte was staying. He finds the little notebook that belonged to Lucien Souris. It contains the overview of what could be done with war money for social work his pépé once quoted to him, as well as the following list:

30,000 years in 12 months (M.A. Lamouche)
October 18 - Iron Age
December 8 - Christian era
December 29 - Louis XIV
December 30: 0.18 H - steam engine; 16 H - railway
December 31: 5:31 a.m. - electric lamp; 2:12 p.m. - crossing the Channel by Blériot plane; 4:12 p.m. - Great War (1st); 12 a.m. - Hiroshima.

Paulo thinks he could extend the list to include the years since 1945. The events of December 30th and 31st would then occur a few minutes earlier, but unfortunately, besides perhaps the development of space travel, he would have to include other conflicts, such as the Vietnam War. 24H might be a little less dramatic today. Why not, for example, include the Prague

Esperanto Manifesto, which will be signed in July?

Paulo highlights some passages from that manifesto to discuss with skeptical pragmatists:

'Neither the world-wide use of a few national languages, nor advances in communication technology, nor the discovery of new methods of language teaching will likely realise the following principles which we consider essential for the equitable and effective use of languages.

1 Democracy

A communication system that privileges some people for life, while requiring others to invest years of energy in achieving a lower level of mastery, is fundamentally undemocratic. (…) We are a movement for democratic communication.

2 Transnational

Each national language is linked to a specific culture and a specific people or country. (…) We maintain that teaching in a national language is linked to a specific worldview. We are a movement for transnational education.

3 Pedagogical Effectiveness

Only a small percentage of those who learn a foreign language actually master it. Complete mastery of Esperanto is even possible through self-study. Several studies have shown that learning Esperanto has a preparatory effect on learning other languages. (…).

4 Multilingualism

The Esperanto community is one of the few language communities worldwide whose speakers are, without exception, bilingual or multilingual. (…) We maintain that speakers of all languages, large and small, should have a realistic opportunity to acquire a second language to a speaking level. We are a movement that provides this opportunity.

5 Language rights

The unequal distribution of power among languages is a recipe for continued linguistic insecurity or outright language oppression for a large part of the world's population. In the Esperanto community, speakers of languages large and small, official and unofficial, meet on neutral ground, thanks to a mutual willingness to compromise. (…). We are a movement for language rights.

6 Linguistic diversity

National governments tend to view the world's great diversity of languages as an obstacle to communication and development. For the Esperanto movement, however, linguistic diversity is a constant and indispensable source of wealth. (…) We are a movement for linguistic diversity.

7 Emancipation of people

Every language both liberates and constrains its speakers, both by allowing them to communicate with each other and by hindering communication with others. Conceived as a universal means of communication, Esperanto (…) is a project to enable every person to participate as an individual in the human community, firmly rooted in their local cultural and linguistic identity, but without being limited by it. (…)

Prague, July 27, 1996.

During his stay in Belgium, Paulo and John bring a short visit to their Chilean friends. They talk about Luís Sepúlveda, who has already published several novels after leading a rather adventurous life.

Paulo really appreciates *The Story of a Seagull and the Cat Who Taught It to Fly* that he can also tell the children. When he can start working as a teacher at the local school after the summer, the Portuguese translation of that booklet as well as *The Eye of the Wolf* by Daniel Pennac are good read-aloud books. He later adapts both into a play with the children.

He recommends these and several other books to Anne, who is looking for good translated literature for adolescents, so they can read a book in their own language and in Dutch. Anne immediately orders several at the newly opened *New Corman* in Ostend thus filling a gap that has long been felt in the city.

Both Anne and Paulo find it a great pity that they cannot find any translations of Guus Kuijer's excellent youth series, which features the girl Madelief as the main character.

In 1997, Joana attends the primary school her sister also attended.

Catherine finishes her first cycle that year, and thus Portuguese primary school.

The family spends part of their holiday in Maria's birthplace, and Paulo takes advantage of this to look at the starry sky with his daughters.

"It's like the stars are all trying to get together for a big carnival parade full of confetti," says Catherine.

"But not all the stars participate," Joana notes, then asks, "Where are the bears, Daddy?"

Paulo helps his daughters find the bears and the North Star, after which he says, "That great confetti-filled procession is also called the Milky Way, or the backbone of darkness. I learned from Carl Sagan who knew a lot about stars, but also a lot about everything that happens on Earth. In one of his books, he explains that there are places on Earth where people say this backbone holds the darkness in place and folds it around itself, preventing it from disintegrating and thus blocking the light from reaching us. I don't remember exactly, but we can read it together if you're interested. The ancient Greeks said that that white band is the milk from the breast of the goddess Hera, which is why we often say Milky Way when we see that procession of stars."

"But those are just stories, aren't they, Dad? Do you believe it's true?" says Catherine.

"They are stories repeated by many. That's how myths begin, and from those myths, sometimes even religions arise. It's sometimes difficult to know whether such a story is true or not. Carl Sagan, who died in December, was a scientist. He loved hearing and telling the stories, and explained that many people invent or retell them because they're trying to explain what they see. He believed that you should always keep asking questions and never be completely satisfied with an explanation. People who believe too much in their own stories run the risk of no longer wanting to ask questions because they think they know the answer once and for all. People

who believe in God, but also people who don't believe in God at all, assume that certain questions shouldn't be asked. Some religions have a book of texts and those who believe accept those stories as being told by their own God to one or more of God's followers.

"Can't those gods write themselves?" asks Joana.

"I don't think anyone is able to know," Paulo answers. "Some believers are called prophets. They are convinced and convince other believers that their God somehow appeared to them and informed them.

There have also been kings in the past who said that they had been put on earth by their god to speak or act in his name, but they usually did this only to say how powerful they were."

"The Pharaohs, Papa?" asks Catherine.

"Among others, but also…"

Joana interrupts Paulo: "Oh, I saw a streak of light fall."

"A shooting star!" says Catherine.

Yes, that's what we often call those streaks of light. But it's not really a shooting star or falling star. The stars aren't shooting or falling but moving relative to each other. What we see are tiny bits of rock or dust reaching Earth's sky and burning up in the atmosphere.

"Is that a story too?" asks Catherine.

"In a sense it is," Paulo answers. "It's the story compiled from the observations of many astronomers and other scientists who, through reasoning and experimentation, arrived at that conclusion together."

"And so, if we were Carl Sagan, we would say maybe the story is right, but maybe it isn't," Catherine says with a frown.

"Something like that," Paulo agrees, "he would say he accepts the hypothesis unless a better explanation comes along. And to find explanations for what happens in nature, people usually use the language of mathematics."

"Yuck," says Catherine. "Do scientists do nothing but calculate?"

“Arithmetic is only a tiny part of mathematics,” Paulo answers. “You’ll learn more about mathematics in the coming years and be amazed at how vast the language is. I know I only understand a tiny, tiny bit of it. That’s why I read books like Carl Sagan’s, because he tries to explain what scientists discover in a much simpler way.”

“Is Carl Sagan a prophet of nature?” asks Catherine.

“That’s a good question,” says Paulo. “I don’t think he’s a prophet. He’s not saying we should believe what he knows about nature; he’s just saying he’s trying to explain what everyone thinks we know about nature, and what we don’t know exactly, and for which we’re looking for explanations. Scientists start by saying something like, ‘*I could be wrong, but*’ and then they explain to other scientists what they think they’ve discovered. Truly knowing something isn’t easy. You need time to read, to try things out for yourself, you need others to discuss what you think you’ve discovered with, you have to learn to be patient and not think you’re the best, you have to remain modest, without being servile to others. Someone else I look up to, and who died this month, is Paulo Freire. He said, among other things, that those who refuse to admit that they impose their will on others don’t allow others to act and think for themselves. And it’s terribly difficult to make some people understand that this is precisely what they do. He thinks that children, like you, should be free at school to ask all the questions they want, to experiment, to make mistakes and start over, and not just to listen to the teacher in front of the class. That helps people keep asking questions, Paulo Freire speaks about themselves and the way they interact with each other, Carl Sagan speaks about nature and how it works.”

“Do scientists have a council, like we have in class?” Joana asks.

“Yes, something like that,” Paulo replies. “Hypotheses are like agreements. Scientists meet, discuss their concerns, make agreements that everyone tries to adhere to, and agree to change those agreements if the problem persists, perhaps precisely because

the agreements they made didn't help them."

Some time before New Year of the last year of the twentieth century, John is astonished to discover that the tourism industry, some of the press, and a many of his friends and acquaintances assume this is already the first year of the new millennium and therefore of the twenty-first century. That summer, Paulo, Maria, and the children are visiting Oostende.

Catherine and Joana spend most of their time with their cousins. Alan, Anne's second son, is the same age as Joana, and the trio is chaperoned by the older Sebastiaan when no adult is around. They spend wonderful days on the beach and at the riding stable where Anne and Sebastiaan have a horse.

One afternoon, John shows Paulo an interview conducted with Lydia Chagoll. She is of Jewish descent, was in-prisoned in a concentration camp as a child, and built a career as a dancer, actress, and artistic director. In that interview, she recounts, among other things, what happened to her when she returned to Brussels from the camp in 1946:

> *I was fifteen and a half when I returned from the camps. Six and a half years without school. At first, I wanted to catch up. I wanted to learn, to work hard. Not to stay stupid, especially not to stay stupid. When I arrived in Brussels in September 1946, I went to all the Flemish secondary schools on my own. I asked to speak to the headmaster or headmistress—I was a bit of a brazen kid. I asked if I could go to their school. They said: so you were in the third grade before the war? And you haven't had any education in the meantime? Well, then you go back to the third grade!*
>
> *With all I had been through and as an adolescent, I couldn't…'*

Paulo isn't as shocked as John. Just last year, he experienced a similar situation at a Portuguese school. A boy who, along with his parents, had been granted political asylum after an adventurous escape from a dictatorial African country was placed in the first year because he didn't know Portuguese, but also wasn't of legal

age for second-chance education. He was fourteen at the time, and one had to be sixteen to attend second-chance education. In his own cultural circle, he was considered an adult, and, incidentally, he was already working as a moped mechanic.

Then Paulo reads the rest of the interview. Apparently, Lydia Chagoll attended a more extensive primary education (MULO) in the Netherlands instead of a regular secondary school, after which she chose Germanic Philology. And then:

> *"One day before my exams, I was called: 'Miss, you don't have a high school diploma, you can't get an academic degree, you have to drop an exam.' I wrote to all the professors to make an exception for me, but at the time, there was no shelter in Belgium for people returning from the camps. The law was the law."*

The next day, Maria briefly revisits the interview that Paulo had also given her to read. She finds another comment by Lydia Chagoll interesting, when she says that the government wants to cultivate yes-men through repression, and then adds: "*The government doesn't like anarchists, people who speak out. Sometimes I'm afraid there aren't really any good intentions behind the policy'*."

"That's nothing new," says John. "Without resorting to conspiracy theories, we see the constant whitewashing of exclusionary schools, with supposedly generous proposals to better accommodate 'behind-behind' children and young people. MULO (extended primary school), second chance, special classes, special education, gifted education, you name it, it exists. Ultimately, it's always about maintaining the mediocre mass school for the average student, with mediocre peripheral solutions for bank deposit education.

And it continues. Six years ago, a declaration of principle was adopted in Salamanca amidst great applause. Once again to propose the generalisation of education, where all children, regardless of any emotional or physical difficulties, should be able to attend classes together in the same school without being sent to peripheral solutions. But in practice, little changes. Interestingly, Portugal

currently seems to be one of the leaders in this process of universal access, at least on paper. Let's hope we don't see the same thing happen as with LOGO programming, which quickly disappeared from the curriculum as soon as primary school teachers considered it to demanding. And in this case, many teachers don't even want to hear about the implementation of the agreement."

Maria notes: "We personally find that Joana's deafness doesn't prevent her from continuing to attend regular school, although she and we have to intervene regularly. Joana's teachers now know not to speak with their backs to the class, for example, when writing on the board. Of course, this shouldn't apply only to someone who is deaf. It's not very respectful to speak with your back to your hearing, so this change benefits not only Joana but also her colleagues and ultimately the teachers themselves. Of course, the challenge is greater with completely deaf children who only use sign language. Interpreters have to be provided, which isn't easy."

"That's exactly what Chagoll's comment is about, I think. Are there any false motives behind the fine pronouncements of those in charge of policy? Isn't there too much placating going on, instead of actually rolling up our sleeves?" asks Paulo.

"I'm afraid it's not just about who's implementing state policy," John begins. "Ensuring the status quo is the concern of anyone who finds security in the institutions. Therefore, it doesn't necessarily have to do only with leaders. Confronted with something that isn't, or isn't yet, comprehensible, even for those who don't want to be leaders can feel uncomfortable. And then anyone who wants to bring about change, who raises critical questions, who makes new proposals, is the traitor."

Paulo says: "You're not talking about religious dogmas?"

"No, I would say that I am talking about a kind of lesser deification. I am thinking of the *Modern School movements.* Freinet is gradually no longer a person, but a name, a concept, a movement, a flag, an institution, ergo, a method… and as with all institutions, you have

the whole gamut of followers. Let me divide them into two categories for convenience: fundamentalists and evolutionists. We saw this recently after the death of Fernand Oury two years ago. In the French *Modern School Movement* voices were raised to officially declare Institutional Pedagogy a deviation, a betrayal of Célestin Freinet's life's work. Yet Oury was the first to constantly refer he was '*a child of Freinet*'. It is not parricide when you build on an ideology in a different environment and in a changing time."

Maria nods. "And meanwhile, there's someone else who's already making Oury a concept and is starting to show the tendency to want to continue Institutional Pedagogy unchanged."

"The whole problem," says John, "is that you can hardly be a follower of a model that proposes to continually re-institute if you consider that model as finished in its execution."

"Yes, there is a tendency to become paralysed," Paulo continues. I remember how, ten years ago, some cooperative groups considered presenting the use of computers in the classroom as the evolution of classroom printing a betrayal, simply because both Freinet and Oury gave that printing workshop a prominent role. But both saw it only as a means to allow children to produce their own texts and thus have a voice. The organisation resulting from the means used, with printing teams, maintenance of type cases, or today, the maintenance of the computer, is not the essence and yet it becomes a didactic recovery of necessary work organisation. When it comes to publishing one's own work, we must be able to move away from the didactic reasoning that it helps children learn to write by touching letters or using a mirror to understand the left-right image. It simply seems to me a superfluous and ill-considered justification for the means used. You might as well say that error analysis can only be properly handled by projecting the text under analysis onto a large screen. Transparent screens are commercially available for displaying on the page of an overhead projector. It won't be long before someone says it's didactically irresponsible not to use a

beamer…"

"There's such a thing as the *zeitgeist*," says John. "Creative teachers are aware of tools that can be useful and bring them into the classroom. Freinet would hardly have been able to talk about computers in his day. It's very different to adapt any tool to the didactic bank deposit model. The computer, loaded with didactic software, could easily play the role of a kind of magical, all-knowing teacher. Even worse is when the means become more important than the end: then free texts have to be written at fixed times determined by the teacher, then self-correcting index cards simply take the place of the sophisticated task packets in textbooks, and so on. And that's exactly what's unfortunately happening today in some schools making from *Freinet a method* — they call themselves method-school —because they introduced several techniques they considered useful but without the necessary well-considered on-going reflexion about cooperative context. Not dialogue, but transmission; not mathematics, but didactics. In these circles, institutional pedagogy is portrayed as a heresy to be avoided, until it too becomes the model method."

Maria then says: "So every school project would be subject to evolve to superficiality?"

John agrees: "There are many reasons for this. In their evolution, schools quickly become a kind of surrogate for their predecessors, whether it's Fröbel, Montessori, Steiner, Freinet, or Freinet-IP. The private sector regulates itself according to the wishes of the client (parents who can afford it), while in the public sector there is pressure from policy, from unions, from teachers who are not inclined to change. Genuine exchange of experiences takes time and energy and is sometimes painful. It seems to me that many *modern school movements* today are descending further into a kind of satisfaction for what was achieved in the past, with nostalgic publications."

"But in society as a whole, I dare say on a global level, there is little

evidence of real cooperation and extensive mutualism these days, despite the fancy names of many foundations, movements, NGOs, etc. including education and knowledge dissemination in their objectives, choose for themselves," Paulo believes.

"You see everywhere, of course, what I call the neoliberal deception, which, with the beautiful but false promise of equal opportunities for everyone, plays the card of the individual and the meritocracy. It's an empty promise because the school, within its social framework, has been given the hidden task of preserving the large class differences," John continues. "And the response to it is sometimes ambiguous. I question proposals like the Mastery Pedagogy with its Vicarious Effect (*Pédagogie de Maîtrise à effet vicariant* or PMEV in French). The initiators talk about '*An approach that allows previous proposals to be concretised within the four walls of the classroom. From Bloom to Freinet, via Reuchlin and Vygotsky, the PMEV has planted its roots in the solid foundations of proven pedagogy. It presents an educational organisation that aims to create a motivating and stimulating work environment for students (and teachers), adapted to the demands of our time.'* That pedagogy, the designers say, is very suitable for atypical students. Atypical... and the "typical students" get the typical bank deposit pedagogy?

But is the atypical really different from the typical?

From the amalgam of proposals I quote:

- fewer corrective measures but a self-learning context;
- preceptorship (interactive teacher-student regulation);
- make full use of teaching time;
- encourage student involvement;
- formative assessment (clearly defining objectives).
- constructivist view of learning.

I wonder if some schools that announce the "Freinet method", whatever that may mean, aren't prefacing these kinds of teaching proposals. The atypical aspect is the hidden dominance of the teacher, where students have no real say, a decoction of adult

parliamentary representation, which in most cases is itself a decoction of democracy, where joint legislation has been lost in favour of an oligarchy of party-driven legislators. But the typical aspect, both in the mass school and in the elite school, closely resembles this.

Maria responds: “I understand what you mean. This misses the essence of what a pluralistic group, and therefore a pluralistic society, might aspire to. In such a pluralistic group, the definition of success might be that each member of the group collectively achieves the highest possible level of knowledge acquisition, that each member of the group succeeds in developing its own frame of reference, complementary to the frames of reference of all the others. Isn’t that the essence of cooperation when the common human well-being is the goal? Isn’t that the humanistic aspect of knowledge acquisition and dissemination? I think that interesting discussions still arise from time to time among members of the *Modern School Movements* in Portugal and elsewhere when the instituing character of the institution is emphasised.”

On the return trip at the end of the holiday, Paulo, Maria, and the children stop in Bayeux. The girls are very interested in the enormous embroidery, which, like a comic strip, depicts a piece of Norman and English royal history, including the Battle of Hastings. Paulo points out the star with the long tail, which is now known to be the comet astronomers named Halley. This comet crosses Earth’s orbit every 76 years. This happened, Paulo says, when Catherine was one year old, and it will happen again in the year 2062, when Catherine will be slightly older than her grandfather is now, and Joana will be 72.

In the letter he enclosed with John’s birthday card, Paulo recounts how enthusiastic the children were, both on the outward and return journeys, visiting some of the places. Why can’t the school be more welcoming to the children? Why does it keep bringing prison,

church, hospital, barracks, and school under *one* roof, to paraphrase Foucault? Can't we really do anything? Will humanity never learn? In his response to the birthday card, John writes:

As you grow older, you have a choice: be bitter or become more mellow. Choose the latter. Your heart stays younger and your surroundings kinder.

I share of course the same opinion that educating the masses to mediocrity and the elite to a leadership caste is and remains the goal of those who wish to retain power. Everywhere…

Despite his great intellect, or perhaps precisely because of it, Anthon Amo, originally from Ghana, was sent back to his country, perhaps because he didn't parrot the rulers and through clever propaganda became a suspect figure for the European university of the eighteenth century. Propaganda is always a threat to people, but so is the limitation of the expression of opinion. A difficult paradox. People are easily influenced by those who most wield liberal arguments, which are limited to more money and more power, which ultimately aren't for everyone. Among those who feel the pressure of the market economy today in what were once planned-economy countries, there are those who harbour a sense of nostalgia for better times. The transition from the communist state to the liberal state doesn't adopt the social-democratic model with controlled social security for all residents, but the aggressive capitalist model in which individuals are each for themselves. I fear that the high level of aggression among the most notorious defenders of a hierarchy based on money and consumerism means, for the time being, that few are working on any kind of new international or new cooperative movements. Collaborations when not limited to monetary transactions have little chance of success today. Cooperation has even less.

But I'm not bitter. I observe that despite the further deterioration of the school systems transformed into punitive institutions for the unemployed, the other school is supported by those on the margins. This school keeps dialogue and knowledge exchange alive, and that benefits pluralism. Alongside the current, there's a margin on both sides. And it's not just

the current that creates the margin; the margins also determine the current.

Paulo reflects on his father's words. He has spent much of his life working with children and adults in for Europe unfavourable conditions. But he knows for certain that those same circumstances would be a formidably comfortable situation elsewhere on the planet. There are limits to the system. For the adults in charge of the school, the children's universal right to education is far from a right to universal knowledge. It is much more a universal obligation of what Paulo calls "democratic obedience".

Since 1945 approximately one hundred former colonies and non-self-governing territories in Asia, Africa, Europe, and parts of the Americas have become independent. By the year 2000, 85 percent of these new states had passed laws that regulated school **duty** and not education **right.** Just as in the early years of the United States of America, former colonies are adopting similar education regulations to those that existed before independence to regulate student attendance.

On January 1, 2001, the debate about when the century began — last year or today — is far from over. You can hardly call it a debate, anyway. It's about yes-no positions that primarily expose a lack of mathematical and historical insight.

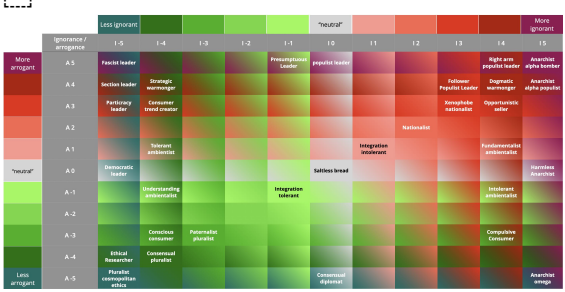
Paulo sees this ultimately quite unimportant fait divers with mixed feelings. He thinks how the vulgarisation of digital information threatens to increase mediocrity rather than decrease it. There's a widespread tendency to listen only to those who say the same thing, to read only what aligns with one's own position, and in doing so, misconceptions spread as quickly or faster than serious contributions to knowledge.

Regarding timekeeping, Paulo strongly supports Cesare Emiliani's idea of introducing a calendar starting at the end of the last ice age. This calendar would clearly begin with year 0. Each century would

then contain years running from 00 to 99, instead of the current years 01 to 00. The recent millennium transition would then fall from 11999 CE to 12000 CE, not between 2000 AD and 2001 AD. The entire world would then not be subject to a kind of standard calendar imposed by the Christian world. The standard calendar begins before any written culture, as far as we know today. It would be for timekeeping somewhat the Prague Manifesto claims Esperanto is for languages.

Reading the collective hysteria in digital discussion groups, where the millennium moment is presented as an absolute fact and not as a coincidence related to the standard calendar spread by the Christian world, a kind of natural phenomenon, leads Paulo to publish a slightly updated version of his grandfather Louis's ignarometric framework:

OBJ



Paulo tells John about his proposed adjustment, to which his father replies that he often feels like living in a caravan, with constantly changing traveling companions, but with the constant desire to bring them all together. He's thinking of Louis and Lucien at this point, he adds. Paulo notes that both his father and he would have difficulty bringing these traveling companions together. They are separated not only in time but also in place and language. They are companions in their own evolution, and they are probably also companions in the evolution of others, but always in varying ways. Furthermore, this desire to bring together our own traveling companions so that they can also become traveling companions for

others is likely the desire of many others as well. Isn't one of the fascinating aspects of being human that everyone can have different traveling companions once they're not locked in their own little room?

For John, speaking with all traveling companions and frequently changing companions is a prerequisite but not a guarantee for pluralism. As he sees it pluralism equates to giving up the struggle for the victory of one's own ideology. You can change traveling companions with a nationalistic or a humanistic view of the planet. Do you intend large-scale or small-scale relocations? How do you keep a network alive of and through humanity? How do we relate to non-arrogant people with an arrogant leader? Not all Americans are arrogant. How do we relate to arrogant people with a humanistic leader? Not all Chileans in the time of Allende were supportive humanists with a pluralistic view of the world… What do we say to the "liberators" who often address the nation, the people of a limited area? Allende also says *Vive Chile* in his last speech, but could it be otherwise? And yet that '*Long live'* according to John of a different nature than when Johnson acts '*in the name of America*' against Vietnam? What is the significance of hearing Khrushchev speak for the USSR? What does mean '*in the name of*' in general? Speaking in the name of a country, a nation, a people? Does such a thing exist? And if so, who speaks? The representative or the usurper? Will the illusion of representation ever disappear and the reality of decision-making emerge? Portugal votes against the resolution on apartheid. Does Portugal vote? Does a segment of an elite that arrogates to itself the right to speak on behalf of all vote? Does a person vote who feels authorised to do so, even when only a minority has given that authorization? The Pharaoh of Portugal, the Sun King of Flanders? Can those who possess or wield power speak on behalf of all and thus consider everyone as property? In whose name did Sun Yat Sen, Kemal Ataturk, Louis Botha, Ben Gurion, Patrice Lumumba, Yasser Arafat, Reza Pahlevi

speak?

In December, Paulo receives the Portuguese luxury reissue of *Cosmos* as a gift from his daughters. He immediately reads them two paragraphs from Ann Druyan's foreword:

> *Carl Sagan dreamed of a truly democratic planetary civilization, where the revelations of the modern scientific revolution would be a natural right for all.*
>
> *This book was written at a time when our planet was contaminated by 60,000 nuclear weapons. Carl Sagan used his wisdom and multifaceted talents to bring us to reason. According to him, if we could develop a perspective based on our true place in the universe, we would become more humble, wise, and farsighted, and less greedy and violent. Once we are freed from the illusions that we are central to the vastness of the universe and from the folly of portraying ourselves as the glory of creation, we could begin to treat our small planet and the life it contains with greater care.*

As Paulo reads the excerpts to his daughters, he wonders if the mediocrity in which the school seems to be immersing the masses is making Carl Sagan's dream impossible. Or could an era of learners be dawning after all, thanks to the tenacity of those on the margins?

End of book 08

A strange letter

Dear Pascal

We are taking advantage of small glitches in the space-time continuum to allow you to become a saga of educators, pedagogues, and anthropogogues. The saga was first published in 122.15 (Holocene calendar), which corresponds to the year 2215 according to the calendar you use in the 21st century.

The dynasty spans 20 generations, from 1630 to 2222 in your era.
When we studied your century in preparation for the work, we found your name and your interest in dialogical learning. That is why we kindly ask you to further disseminate the documents we send whenever we get the chance.

You can rest assured. The glitch in the continuum will have no impact on the past or future of living people. Only documents can be sent through it.

On behalf of the team of writers,

Maria Liber